



Tropentag, October 6-8, 2009, Hamburg

“Biophysical and Socio-economic Frame Conditions
for the Sustainable Management
of Natural Resources”

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

MASTEWAL YAMI DEGEFA, CHRISTIAN REINHARD VOGL, MICHAEL HAUSER

University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU), Department for Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Austria

Abstract

In Africa, common pool resources (CPRs) management plays a crucial role for livelihood security and conservation of natural resources. This makes sustainable CPR management an essential component to be considered in rural poverty reduction interventions. In such efforts, the need of institutions to mobilise community at grassroots level has been highlighted by various donors and development agencies. At this point, the need of empirical evidence which examines the contributions and constraints of different institutional arrangements in rural sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) becomes an important research task. This paper compares the effectiveness of informal and formal institutions for sustainable CPRs management in SSA and investigates the social, political, and demographic conditions which influence the institutions' effectiveness. By focusing on publications addressing micro-level CPR management, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. Articles were grouped, based on main themes of the study, including types of institutions and conditions that influence their effectiveness. Textual data was analysed qualitatively using a deductive coding approach. Results revealed that informal institutions have contributed to sustainable CPRs management by mediating access to and control over CPRs, influencing interactions of CPR users, developing and mobilising social capital, and solving collective action problems. Although published evidence suggested less support to formal institutions under decentralised governmental reforms, they play an important role to implement technologies for sustainable CPR management. Conditions that influence effectiveness of both types of institutions include high population growth on limited CPRs, unequal power sharing among CPR users, and lack of clearly defined responsibilities to institutions. Emphasis should be given to create collaborative conditions in which both types of institutions have specific and supportive roles with proper power relations among CPR users. Furthermore, policies and development interventions that encourage negotiation and active participation of CPR users in decision making are essential.

Keywords: Common pool resources, Formal, Informal, Institutions, sub-Saharan Africa, collaborative conditions

Contact Address: Mastewal Yami Degefa, University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU), Department for Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Gymnasiumstrasse 85/pf335, 1190 Vienna, Austria, e-mail: mastewalyami@yahoo.com