

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



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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 Blik, 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)

| Aspects | Informal institutions | Formal institutions |
|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Nature of evolution | Endogenous | Exogenous |
| Functional and structural arrangements | Site specific | Common at district or national level |
| External input and material support | Low | High |
| Consideration of social and cultural embeddedness | High | Low |
| Ownership | Local communities | State |
| Enforcement and monitoring | Based on agreement of community | Legally by state |



Figure 1 Communal grazing land (top) and Church forest (bottom) managed by informal institutions in Tigray, Ethiopia (Pictures were taken by first author)

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.

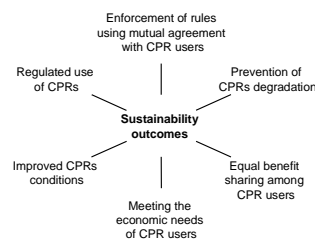


Figure 2 Main Sustainability Outcomes of Common Pool Resources (CPRs) Management in sub Saharan Africa (illustrated by authors)

Active community participation, high social capital and shared beliefs among CPR users enhanced effectiveness of informal institutions to sustainable CPR management. On the contrary, CPRs use conflicts and high population growth on limited CPRs hindered effectiveness of informal institutions.

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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