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Community meetings in Africa

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Promoting good governance in natural resource management in Africa

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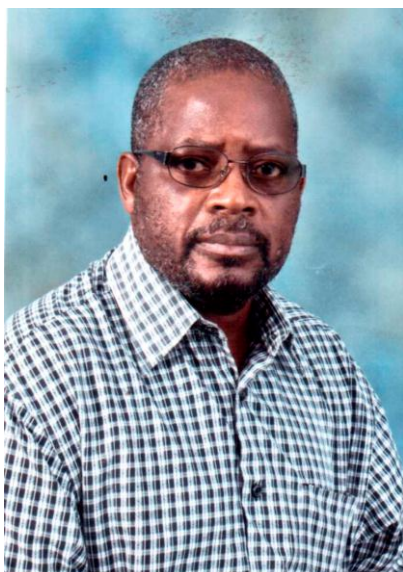
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COUNTRY FOCUS: Zambia

The forest governance challenge of REDD+: Core governance issues that must be addressed for success in Zambia

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Summary

Recently, REDD+ has emerged as an international vehicle for contributing to halting deforestation and degradation as well as enhancing forest carbon stocks. Beyond its potential to deliver benefits related to the carbon cycle, REDD+ also seeks to contribute to the sustainable management of forests and poverty reduction. However, despite its global support there are a range of governance issues that may affect REDD+'s ability to deliver on its stated environmental and social goals. This paper examines some of these governance issues. Using the case of Zambia, the paper shows that the REDD+ process will need to deal with a number of long lingering governance challenges that have besieged the country's forest sector. In particular, the paper draws attention to the following core governance issues in Zambia: a highly centralised forest governance system, an inadequate foundation for effective participatory forest governance, an unclear resource tenure system and inconsistent policy and institutional frameworks at both local and national levels. It concludes that to achieve its intended goals, REDD+ will need to overcome these governance challenges in Zambia, or risk being undermined by them.

Introduction

Located in Southern Africa, Zambia is well endowed with forests which cover over 60% of the country's land area. With this rich forest heritage, achieving sustainable forest management (SFM) has emerged as an important priority for the country (GRZ, 2010). Zambia has embraced REDD+ as one of the initiatives that can contribute towards SFM. REDD stands for "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries." REDD+ goes beyond deforestation and forest degradation, and includes the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (Anon. 2008). REDD+ is an innovative mechanism for forest carbon offsetting and is emerging as a crucial climate change mitigation instrument. The key assumption is that activities carried out within the framework of the REDD+ mechanism will help decrease the cost of reducing emissions while at the same time increasing the value of standing forests, stemming biodiversity loss and reducing poverty. The solutions the mechanism offers have been

positively viewed across the Globe. REDD+ aims to achieve its objectives through the use of international funds and market based mechanisms to pay and compensate developing countries for protecting forests under their jurisdiction against deforestation and degradation (Petkova et al, 2010). However, while REDD+ offers a real opportunity to arrest the current rates of deforestation and promote sustainable forest management, it is also widely recognized that there are a range of governance issues that may negatively affect its potential to deliver the stated environmental and social objectives. REDD+ has the potential to either contribute to, or to undermine, sound national forest governance efforts, depending on application and use made of the possibilities offered by the initiative. In this paper, we take a look at some of the governance issues that may influence REDD+ outcomes in Zambia. In particular, we concentrate on the core governance elements that Zambia needs to address to ensure that activities carried out within the framework of REDD+ successfully contribute towards the goals of the programme. While the issues raised refer primarily to Zambia, they may also be relevant for other countries in Africa involved in the REDD+ processes.

The concept of forest governance

As a concept, governance has a variety of meanings. Traditionally, governance has been viewed as synonymous with government's exercise of power. In this paper, we take Larson and Petkova's (2012) definition of governance as referring to how decisions are made (and who makes them) at various scales (global, national and local), including formal and informal institutions and rules, power relations and practices of decision making. Taken this way, it can be argued that governance is an interaction between actors, institutions and processes that underpin decision making. Forest governance arrangements are mainly expressed through policy and institutional frameworks, planning and decision making processes and implementation and compliance mechanisms (FAO, 2012). A number of attributes are viewed as key elements of good governance. These are transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, fairness and accountability and participation (Ozinga 2012; FAO, 2012). "Good forest governance" is one where forest related decision making processes are underpinned by such attributes. Similarly, for REDD+ to be a success, it is essential that systems of forest governance have high levels of

accountability, transparency, fairness and foster multi-stakeholder participation.

Zambia and REDD+

The government of the republic of Zambia is one of the countries actively involved in the "REDD+ readiness process" (GRZ 2010). For a country where efforts aimed at conserving the country's forests have been faltering (with deforestation rates of 250, 000 - 300,000 hectares per year), REDD+ promises to open a new page in Zambia's quest to protect its forests. Through REDD+ the country can develop and implement rational land use plans. However, Zambia's forest sector is characterised by several governance challenges that may influence the outcomes of REDD+ processes. These constraints include an overly centralised forest governance system, an inadequate foundation for participatory forest governance, unclear tenure arrangements and inconsistent and conflicting policy and institutional frameworks at national and local levels. It is important to note that with its promise of financial incentives and support, REDD+ is likely to attract a range of local to global level actors with varying interests. This may present risks and lead to land grabs or to the exclusion of local populations from access and use of the forests. Further, it may lead to disenfranchisement of local populations and/or unfair distribution of REDD+ related costs and benefits (Petkova et al, 2010; Mustalahti 2012 et al). In order to deliver on its objectives and contribute to good and effective forest governance, the REDD+ readiness process in Zambia must act as a catalyst for, among other things: resource tenure reforms; local participation and decentralisation; and harmonisation of policy and institutional frameworks. In the following section, we deal with these aspects in more detail.

Land and forest tenure

Like many other African countries, land tenure in Zambia is split between a modern tenure system emphasizing state land holding (which allows leasehold) and a customary tenure system, where land holders have access to land through customary rights and tradition. According to Zambia's Lands Act of 1995 (GRZ, 1995), all land in Zambia is vested in the President; this includes customary land. While both categories of land are vested in the presidency, the two (leasehold and customary) are administered differently and are associated with different degrees of security of tenure. Customary tenure does not have the same legal effect as

leasehold, and it is viewed as the least secure of the options, as landholders have no formal documentation to prove their land rights. In the context of REDD+, the extent to which customary landholders can benefit from REDD+ mechanisms, without secure land tenure is questionable. As Knox et al (2011) argued, to be applicable, REDD+ requires clearly defined ownership and secure tenure rights.

In addition to the above, the Land Act in Zambia gives power to traditional authorities in relation to the allocation, alienation and the general administration of customary land. However it does not provide proper safeguards on how the use of such power can be supervised, especially for the protection of local communities' land rights. Given the financial benefits associated with REDD+, there is a danger that local chiefs might collude with powerful interest groups and alienate land for REDD+ projects to the detriment of customary landholders. Further, the vesting of all land in the presidency means that by implication (and this is reaffirmed in the Forest Policy and Forest Act), all forests fall under state ownership. Landholders under customary tenure thus cannot claim ownership of forests located on lands under their jurisdiction and have no legal mandate to protect such forests from exploitation by outsiders. This has been a major source of conflict in Zambia, where competing claims to forests on customary land have persisted over time (Mfune, 2011). It is crucial that REDD+ mechanisms foster reforms that deliver resource tenure security to local stakeholders and create the necessary space, opportunities and incentives for local actors to sustainably manage forests on customary lands.

Decentralisation, participation and harmonisation of policies

An emerging global trend in forest governance over the past two decades has been the focus on decentralisation and participation of various stakeholders in sustainable forest management and conservation. While decentralisation emphasises the devolution of power from the central state to local government bodies, communities and other local level actors, participation seeks the involvement of a variety of stakeholders, including local populations, the civil society and private businesses in natural resource governance. Given the array of interests associated with REDD+, and a focus on a national approach to verification of emissions reduction,

there are concerns that, rather than foster devolution and participation of local populations in forest governance, REDD+ may in fact, lead to re-centralisation of control over forests and inhibit the participation of local communities in forest management (Cronkleton et al, 2011). In Zambia, there have been efforts to establish decentralised forest governance systems and implement participatory forest projects within the framework of joint forest management (JFM) since the late 1990s. Joint Forest Management allows for the sharing of responsibilities, control and decision making authority over forests between the state and local resource users (GRZ, 2007; Hobley, 1996). However, efforts aimed at establishing JFM in the country have yielded few results due to a variety of challenges including financial, technical and institutional constraints (Mfune, 2011).

Currently, the lead institution in forest governance in Zambia is the Forest Department (FD), a government agency established under the Forests Act of 1973 with a primary mandate to protect and manage the country's forest resources. The FD, however, should not stand alone when the country is preparing for REDD+ (Chundama, 2009), as local communities, local governments and the civil society should be included. This requires a decentralized governance framework, where decision-making power over forests is shared with local populations. It is required that a variety of institutions, capacities, skills, and other resources are brought together if REDD+ mechanisms are to benefit forests and people. These resources are currently distributed across different state and non-state institutions and actors in the country, and the FD must bring these together. Moreover, REDD+ projects and activities must be tailored to local specificities, taking into consideration that communities across the country are characterised by socio-cultural diversity. The FD faces a managerial and political challenge in mobilising these actors and their resources together to steer changes needed for the successful implementation of REDD+.

How, then, should the FD organize the forest governance network in such a way that there is a shared vision of REDD+ among the various institutions and stakeholders involved in the process? The answer lies in the extent to which the FD can build mutual trust between inter-dependent actors and the institution itself, creating a policy network which takes advantage of the capacities and resources of both state and non-state actors,

while the FD continues to provide leadership and facilitation in REDD+ related governance (Hoff, 2003; Jessop, 2003). Furthermore, forest policies and institutional frameworks need to be harmonized with those of other sectors such as agriculture, energy and wildlife, which earlier have been seen as conflicting and which, in turn, has led to a lack of inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination. REDD+ issues cut across Zambia's policy sectors, which implies that multiple government agencies should be involved in the process (GRZ 2007).

Conclusions

This paper has highlighted some of the important governance challenges that are likely to influence REDD+ outcomes. Establishing effective governance systems is one of the monumental tasks that will be required for the successful implementation of REDD+ in Zambia. Effective forest governance systems are also crucial for achievement of sustainable forest management in general. The resource governance challenges which must be addressed include a weak resource tenure system, inadequate local participation and inconsistent institutional and policy arrangements. This paper has argued that to achieve its intended goals, REDD+ will need to overcome these governance challenges or risk being undermined by them.

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