

**ASSURING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA BY 2020:
Prioritizing Action, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships**
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SUMMARY NOTE

Parallel Session: **Implementing Action in Key Areas: Strengthening Governance**

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Title: **FOREST GOVERNANCE: Moving from Rhetoric to Reality**

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“Sustainable development was once a radical concept. Today it has lost its edge and means everything to everyone.” Is governance going the same way?

Natural resources such as forests and land remain central to rural livelihoods. land pressure intensifies, the greatest value of the forests is as a source of land for agricultural expansion. Hence, forestry issues need to be looked at within the complex nexus of agriculture, health, population, health, water, livestock, and energy.

There are volumes written on forest governance and decentralization in particular. Many governments espouse the importance of decentralization and many have put in place laws and policies that grant some measure of autonomy over the management of forests or natural resources by local governments or other local authorities. However, research has shown that the reality is very different from the rhetoric. Laws and regulations often contradict each other. The confusion that ensues effectively takes away or limits the very rights that central governments claim local authorities or communities have over the forests or resources. Often the central state agencies expected to spearhead decentralization and the local organizations that are expected to provide future leadership lack capacity to assume such roles.

1. Action: Do not abandon decentralization but rather find ways of improving on what we know and make long term commitments.
2. Action: Rights over forests and the rules and laws must be secure. If they can be withdrawn without notice then people’s response will be to maximize short-term gains such as over-exploitation of the forests before the rights are withdrawn.
3. Action: Lack of capacity should not be an excuse for not implementing decentralization. Governments should invest in capacity building otherwise state forestry agencies can be accused of undermining decentralization.

Forests tend to be physically located where local people often make decisions about their management and use on a regular basis without central government authority. For this reason they lend themselves to decentralization more than other sectors such as infrastructure and services. But forests

are also a resource that can generate much conflict when power is decentralized. Their multiple functions mean that forests have numerous and often-competing demands placed on them that fuel conflicts. This in itself complicates forest governance issues.

4. Action: Clarify roles and responsibilities at all levels to avoid conflicts and corruption.
5. Action: Accountability has to be at multiple levels and there must be credible institutions that can monitor and guarantee any rights once they have been allocated.
6. Action: Simplify laws and regulations so that it is clear which rules or laws take precedence. When the rules of the game are not clear we have abuse of power and no accountability.

Why should management of forests be decentralized? This depends on who is asking the question. Governments often want to decentralize in order to cut costs in the name of efficiency, gain legitimacy by being seen to be decentralizing power and benefits, or reaffirming private property rights. Donors on other hand have also pushed central governments to adopt important laws to support greater decentralization in the name of democracy. Under such circumstances governments may reluctantly succumb to donor pressure to secure promised funding without actually implementing any meaningful changes. Local governments and local authorities would advocate for decentralization because it can mean greater control over natural resources and livelihoods and better access to financial resources. It also enables them to make the central government more accountable.

7. Action: Governments should manage donor and NGO support very carefully. Many well-intentioned donor projects do not always fit well with national development priorities.

Power, politics and policy

The contribution of forests to livelihoods is dependent among other things on:

- Resource endowment;
- Skills, knowledge, technology and financial resources to sustainably manage the forests; and
- Policies, rules, laws and organizations through which people can have access to forest resources.

By exploring different combinations of the above people are able to explore livelihood strategies appropriate to their context and needs. However, the ability to develop appropriate strategies is influenced by POWER relations. Power ultimately determines who gets to sit around the policy fire and whose ideas get included in policies and decisions around access to resource and allocation of benefits.

Decentralization is not a panacea to the challenge of improving the livelihoods of forest dependent people. However, if carried out in a manner that allows for meaningful delegation of powers over forests to representative and accountable local institutions accompanied by a clear and unified legal framework, then it can be a powerful intervention. It can address the issues of equity, democracy and provides the means through which people can take advantage of the opportunities that society has to offer.

Often the poor and powerless are seen as the problem rather than the solution of forest degradation. Policies and institutions that do not expand the opportunities for the poor to invest in forest management in a manner that enhances their livelihoods will be rejected by the people. At the same time, while we seek to create the space for the poor we should not lose sight of the impact of the activities of the non-poor. They are the source of much of the environmental damage.

So the critical point to be made is that the world of governance in reality is **COMPLEX, UNCERTAIN, POLITICAL**, and is influenced by **POWER**. Because of this complexity we should not expect overnight miracles with respect to people's livelihoods.

8. Action: Evolve policies that go beyond protecting the biophysical environment and people as seen by the state and the powerful. A rights-based approach tries to look at multiple values of the people and not just the environment.

From participation to empowerment and from assisted to organic models

Recognizing this complexity and the failure of many central projects, development experts have sought to articulate various models that devolve decision making to, and retention of benefits at the lower levels. The packaging of policies, laws, power and politics into "governance" approaches has many names such as:

- Community-based natural resources management (CBNRM)
- Decentralization
- Participatory resource management
- Resource sharing models
- Adaptive co-management

There have been mixed results with many of these approaches. In many instances claims of success in the various reports has not been matched by the reality on the ground.

9. Action: Continue to explore different approaches and improve on existing models based on objective analyses of lessons learnt. This means promoting "organic" as well as "assisted" forms of local-level forest management
10. Action: Ensure a balance between **supply led and demand driven decentralization**. Decentralization that excludes locals often does not work because the intended beneficiaries simply will not support policies that they were not party to.

Managing Conflict?

Decentralized management can be complicated and a potential source of much conflict between competing interests. Further, mere decentralization does not in itself guarantee equity or participation given the fact that the process is strongly influenced by power and politics. But where there are numerous local organizations there can be confusion. For instance, in some countries there are local government authorities, elected local government bodies, political parties and traditional leaders all vying for influence and power in the same jurisdiction and over the same resources. When conflicts arise the resolution processes can be quite difficult with aggrieved parties going where they think they can get a favorable outcome.

11. Action: Decisions should be supported by clear widely acceptable rules/agreements about entitlements and authority.
12. Action: Establish resolution systems based on mutual respect and the right of all to be heard. This demands the acceptances of the legitimacy of different views and approaches so as to find common ground.

International processes and local governance

Decentralization processes are often complicated by global processes such as globalization. Governments are often under pressure from donors to implement decentralization policies and liberalize their economies without due regard for the national economic context and priorities. Many of these adjustment solutions are based on the concern of globalization experts that there is too much government intervention in the economy. And yet the opposite is the real concern. The role of the state to cushion individuals and society from rapid economic change has been weakened. The state's role in terms of providing laws and courts that can protect and uphold people's rights is further weakened.

13. Action: Economic growth & development must be consistent with national ideals and aspirations in a manner that manages globalization trends. A good example is how Malaysia resisted forces of global economic integration at the time of the Asian economic crisis. Instead the country implemented strong economic controls and cushioned the impact of the crisis.
14. Action: We should invest in our ability to participate effectively in international negotiations so that Africans set the agenda.

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