DECENTRALISATION AND FOREST MANAGEMENT IN UGANDA
In Support of: The Intercessional Country-Led Initiative on Decentralisation, Federal Systems of Forestry and National Forestry Programmes

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ABSTRACT

Local governments in Uganda manage 5000 hectares (ha) of local forest reserves and oversee the forests on private lands, which constitute 70 percent of Uganda’s forests. Ten years after the decentralisation process was introduced in Uganda, it is not really embraced forests. Friction between the central government Forestry Department and local governments continues because the laws governing local governments and those governing forestry have not clarified whether forests are decentralised or not. The ensuing confusion has led to deterioration of forests through illegal harvesting and encroachment for agriculture and settlement. Local forest reserves created in 1998 were not transferred to local governments with corresponding resources to manage them. Therefore, they did not take up the responsibility. These reserves also became heavily encroached. Decentralisation has inspired almost no public or private investment at the forest level. However, definable individual financial benefits indicate the beginnings of private capital investment in forestry.

Key words: decentralization, forest reserves, local governments

INTRODUCTION TO FORESTRY IN UGANDA

Forests and Land Cover

Uganda covers a total surface area of 241,038 km². About 82 percent of this is land area and the rest is water and swamps (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2001). Subsistence farmland covers 41 percent of the land area, while forests cover 24 percent and bush land 7 percent. The remaining 28 percent is grasslands, water, swamps, built up areas, roads, etc. (Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment 2002). Forests in Uganda cover 4.9 million hectares (ha) and consist of woodlands¹ (81 percent), tropical high forests (19 percent), and plantation area (less than 1 percent).

Thirty percent of the forests are managed by government agencies, namely the Forestry Department (FD)--now transforming into the National Forestry Authority (NFA)--local governments, and the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA). The permanent forest estate is composed of 1.9 million ha, representing about 9 percent of the total land area of Uganda (Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment 2001). It covers all forest reserves (1.2 million ha) and forested areas in national parks (0.7 million ha). Seventy percent of the forests are to be found on private lands. Appendix 1 shows the protected areas in Uganda. Table 1 shows Uganda’s forests and woodlands and the institutions mandated to manage them.

¹Trees > 4 metres in height but canopy cover ≥ 30%.
FD reports show that 50 percent of the tropical high forests (THF) on private lands are degraded and 17 percent of those in protected areas are degraded. The main reasons for the degradation include harvesting for timber, firewood and charcoal, and encroachment for agriculture and human settlement. Therefore, it has been rather belatedly realised that efforts to instill responsible forest management should also be directed at owners of private lands with forests.

Table 1: Approximate Areas (in hectares) of Forest and Woodland under Different Categories of Ownership and Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Cover</th>
<th>Forest Reserves* (CFR &amp; LFR)</th>
<th>National Parks &amp; Wildlife Reserves</th>
<th>Private &amp; Customary Lands</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tropical High Forest</td>
<td>306,000</td>
<td>267,000</td>
<td>351,000</td>
<td>924,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodlands</td>
<td>411,000</td>
<td>462,000</td>
<td>3,102,000</td>
<td>3,975,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Plantations</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>33,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Forest</td>
<td>737,000</td>
<td>731,000</td>
<td>3,464,000</td>
<td>4,932,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Land Cover Types</td>
<td>414,000</td>
<td>1,167,000</td>
<td>13,901,000</td>
<td>15,482,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Land</td>
<td>1,151,000</td>
<td>1,898,000</td>
<td>17,365,000</td>
<td>20,414,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Central Forest Reserve (CFR) and Local Forest Reserve (LFR)

Forest industries are small-scale and owned almost entirely by Ugandans. Markets are also largely domestic, although there are increasing exports of value-added forest products, especially within the region.

Population

Provisional results from the 2002 census show that total population is 24.7 million people and an average population density of 126 persons/km. From 1991, population grew by 3.4 percent (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002). Per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was Uganda Shillings 422,641 (US$216) with a GDP growth rate of 4.9 percent in 2002/03 (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development 2003).

History of Decentralisation of Forest Management in Uganda

Forest management in Uganda has been decentralised and recentralised a number of times since Independence in 1962. The changes often came as a result of policies adopted by different governments in the management of public affairs. Until the late 1990s, forest management in Uganda was mainly a public matter, more or less confined to forest reserves (FRs).

Before 1967, there was a vibrant local government (LG) forestry service, which ran local forest reserves (LFRs), especially under the kingdoms that had built strong coherent government systems from the colonial days. At that time, LGs had powers to decide on development priorities for their areas. Nevertheless, the central government (CG) was still responsible for managing some of the FRs.
In 1967, the Ugandan government adopted a republican constitution, which centralized virtually all government decision-making powers. Consequently, all LFRs became central forest reserves (CFRs).

In 1993, the government adopted the policy of decentralisation. This also decentralised FRs. But it soon became clear that the LGs were not yet ready to take on forest management responsibilities fully. They needed revenue to run more urgent activities like education, water, and health, which had also been decentralised. So, they set about harvesting the forests with little consideration for planned management.

Therefore, FRs were recentralised in 1995, but this time through subsidiary legislation, rather than the principal law. This turned out to be a rather unpopular move in LG circles. As a result, the LGs challenged the legal basis (albeit outside the law courts) for recentralising the FRs and maintained pressure on the central government to decentralise them again.

In 1995, Uganda adopted a new constitution. This constitution embraced the 1993 decentralisation policy fully but it remained ambivalent regarding management of forests. Since then the LGs have been asking the CG to hand over all FRs to them, arguing (probably correctly) that the law vested only FR policy in the CG. On the other hand, the CG (especially the FD) argued (probably correctly also) that the LGs did not have the capacity and sufficient will to manage FRs professionally.

The National Forestry and Tree Planting Act of 2003 maintained the 1998 state of affairs but this time it created a semi-autonomous National Forestry Authority (NFA) out of the FD. While the FD had been responsible for all aspects of forestry in the country, the NFA was created with the responsibility to manage only CFRs only. It remains to be seen how the LGs will react to this but indications are that they may go along with this.

So the results of all these changes are mixed. Just after Independence, the LFRs were run efficiently, but then all government activities were also well run. Up to the mid-1970s, the FRs were well managed even though they were centralised. Thereafter, the efficiency with which FRs were managed depended on available resources from the CG. The FRs have never been decentralised long enough to help us judge the impact of decentralisation on sustainable forest management. On the other hand, other decentralised sectors like health, education, and roads still depend on grants from the CG. Therefore, the CG still maintains a strong influence on how things are run by LGs. Forestry is not likely to be different until the LGs have built sufficient revenue bases of their own.

**CONTEXT AND FEATURES OF DECENTRALISATION IN RELATION TO FORESTRY**

**Decentralisation in Uganda**

The most widely understood form of decentralisation in Uganda is *devolution* of financial and decision-making powers to sub-national structures at various levels (Figure 2).
Figure 2: Hierarchy of the Local Government Structure in Uganda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural Areas</th>
<th>Urban Areas</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Council 5</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Council 4</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Administrative only with an advisory/monitoring role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Council 3</td>
<td>Sub-county</td>
<td>City Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Municipal Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Town Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Council 2</td>
<td>Parish</td>
<td>Ward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Council 1</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Electorate

Adapted from the Local Government Act, 1997

Article 176 (b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995 states that:

*decentralisation shall be a principle applying to all levels of local government and in particular, from higher to lower local government units to ensure peoples’ participation and democratic control in decision making.*

Consequently, the purpose of the Local Governments Act, 1997 is:

*... to give effect to the decentralisation and devolution of functions, powers and services; to provide for decentralisation at all levels of Local Governments to ensure good governance and democratic participation in, and control of decision making by the people...*  

While *deconcentration* transfers most of the day-to-day activities from the CG, all major decisions are still made there. The FD has been operating along those lines for a long time. For example, District Forest Officers undertake most operational responsibilities, like forest management planning, budgeting and supervision of forest-level fieldwork but the forest management plans and budgets have to be approved by the dead of the FD in Kampala.
The general objectives of decentralisation in Uganda are as follows (Damian Kato 1997):

- To transfer real power to the districts and thus reduce the load on remote and under-resourced central government officials;
- To bring political and administrative control over services to the point where they are actually delivered, and thus reduce competition for power at the center and improve accountability and effectiveness;
- To free local managers from central constraints and thus, allow them to develop organizational structures tailored to local circumstances;
- To improve financial accountability and responsibility by establishing a clear link between payment of taxes and the provision of services they finance;
- To restructure government machinery in order to make the administration of the country more effective; and
- To create a democracy that would bring about more efficiency and productivity in the state machinery through involvement of the people at all levels.

Legal Developments Shaping Decentralisation of Forestry

Until the late 1990s management of forests was largely a function of the CG. Planned management has been practiced almost entirely only in FRs. There has been virtually no planned management of forests on private lands until private companies and individuals started to acquire permits to grow their own forest plantations in grassland FRs in the mid-1990s.

Before 1967, when the government abolished the Independence federal constitution, most of the FRs were managed through decentralised mechanisms. The mechanisms were mainly the deconcentration type where district officials did most of the work without asking the CG, provided the annual plans and budgets were approved and adhered to. Financial allocations were done through departmental warrants from the CG after the plans and budgets had been approved. Provided one did not make significant variations in the annual work plan, one usually operated more or less as an independent entity. At that time there were vibrant LG services, which had built coherent government systems from the colonial days. The LGs planned and executed all the activities in the districts. Revenue was collected and used within the LGs work plans and budgets. The LGs could hire and fire their own staff. The salary structure was even different from that of civil servants in the CG.

In 1967, the government adopted a republican constitution, which centralized virtually all government decision-making powers. All FRs were now managed by the FD (a CG line department). LGs were stripped of all decision-making powers in matters of forest management, including forests on public lands.

At this time, Uganda had one of the best forest management services in Africa. In spite of being managed by a CG department, the FRs were well managed. Things started going wrong when the government was overthrown by the military in 1971.

In 1993, the government fully embarked on the decentralisation process through the Local Governments (Resistance Councils) Statute 1993. This Statute decentralised forests. However, it was soon realized that the LGs were not prepared to engage in professional forest management.

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4 The first and main sub-national administrative level of government in Uganda.
management. They saw forests as sources of revenue to fund development activities in other sectors like health, education, and roads that had been decentralised.

As a result, forests were recentralised in December 1995 under Statutory Instrument No. 52 of the same year. The LGs were never satisfied with this turn of events. At this time, the LGs had become fully aware of their powers and the electorate had internalized their power of influencing government decisions. So people started encroaching on FRs with the tacit consent of their elected leaders, and illegal harvesters of forest products (especially timber and charcoal) from FRs started to become openly unrepentant. Soon, some of the FD staff, finding themselves working against political forces that could influence their removal from office, quietly joined the elected leaders to collude with encroachers and illegal forest produce dealers.

Since then, the FD has never managed to reverse this state of affairs. In fact, most of the serious cases of encroachment and illegal harvesting in Uganda today started or expanded considerably during the election periods. The intractable encroachment problems in South Busoga and Luwunga FRs grew and consolidated during these election periods. For example, even after the government had won a court case against the encroachers in Luwunga FR, the LG political leaders made it impossible for court orders to be carried out, a case in point where decentralised powers caused a miscarriage of justice.

That is probably why the constitution of 1995 is ambivalent regarding management of forests. Article 237 (b) authorizes “…Government or local government as determined by parliament by law …” to hold forests in trust for the people of Uganda. The Sixth Schedule in the constitution leaves “forest and game reserve policy” and “…the environment” with the CG but it does not mention forests, although forests are a major national concern as far as environment is concerned. This then leaves forests among “…any other functions and services not specified in the 6th Schedule to this Constitution” to the district councils.

The legislators failed to take a decisive constitutional stand. They understood the need for forest protection but they also could not openly stand against the people who had elected them. The constitutional process failed to resolve the social aspects of sustainable forest management.

Because the LGs never really accepted the recentralisation that took place just before the constitution was promulgated, the Local Government Act, 1997 picked up the Sixth Schedule and included it as part (1) of its Second Schedule. But this time, part (2) of the Schedule specifically mentions forests as a function of LGs. This effectively decentralised the forests again. In spite of the above, the government used the Forests Act, 1964 to gazette Statutory Instrument No. 63 of 1998, which created CFRs and LFRs. This was an attempt to appease LGs and their tacit supporters in the CG. But the areas involved were small: 192 LFRs totaling just under 5,000 ha. This left 542 CFRs totaling 1,455,130 ha. Thus the impasse was not resolved and the social standoff between staff and people living near the FRs continued.

In July 1993, the Traditional Rulers (Restitution of Assets and Properties) Statute was gazetted. This would have paved the way for the traditional rulers (kingdoms and other chiefdoms) to reclaim the forests that belonged to their kingdoms before 1967. Unfortunately today, the traditional rulers do not have legal authority to hold CFRs or LFRs because the Local Government Act does not legally define traditional institutions as LGs. Consequently, in 2001, an executive order under a memorandum of understanding between the CG and
authorities of Bunyoro Kingdom providing for the return of some of the FRs to the king could
not be effectively implemented. Although the dead of the FD wrote to the kingdom
authorities allowing them to take over management of Mukihani FR, the Government
Solicitor General advised that the kingdom could not hold FRs in trust for the people of
Uganda. However, the FD did not have sufficient political backing to reclaim the FR. Taking
advantage of the impasse, the kingdom simply continued to allow timber harvesting in an
uncontrolled manner, resulting in the decimation of the forest plantation (3,619 ha) to the
financial advantage of a few individuals and not even the kingdom as an institution.

By 2001, when the Forestry Policy was promulgated, the CFRs were de facto under the CG
but the de jure status had not been settled. Even this Policy was not decisive. For example, it
says that: “…efforts will be made to clarify the role of local governments in management of
forest resources…...Any ambiguities and contradictions in the provisions of the
Constitution, the Local Governments Act and the Land Act with respect to the role of districts
in forest sector development will be addressed.”

The National Forests and Tree Planting Act, 2003 attempted to clarify these ambiguities by
distinguishing the CFR, LFR, community forests and private forests. The respective
responsible bodies for these categories of forests are the NFA, LGs (also community forests)
and the private forest owners themselves. UWA remains responsible for forests in national
parks and wildlife reserves, which are managed under the Uganda Wildlife Statute, which
will be discussed later. Now the LGs will directly collect and use revenue from outside CFRs.
Today, this is about 2 percent of the total FD revenues of Uganda Shs. 1.5 billion on average
annually. In the past this used to go to the consolidated account of the CG.

It is still too early to tell how the new policy and law will impact on forest management.
However, going by the views expressed during the participatory processes through which the
policy and law were developed, the parties involved seemed to have been satisfied with these
arrangements. Heated discussions will arise when it comes to apportioning LFRs and CFRs,
but when that is agreed, all parties may start to cooperate on the path to sustainable forest
management.

Other Legal and Institutional Frameworks Shaping Decentralisation in the Forestry
Sector

Land Act, 1998

Deriving from Article 237 of the 1995 constitution, the Land Act vests ownership of land in
the citizens of Uganda, but as stated earlier, the CG and LGs can hold FRs and other natural
resources on behalf of all Ugandans. However, LGs may request the CG to manage any of the
resources that are held by it. So far, no LG has formally invoked this constitutional provision.

In exercising their right to manage these resources, the CG and LGs “…shall not lease out or
otherwise alienate any natural resource…” they hold in trust for the people. However, they
may grant licenses, concessions or permits for use of the resources.

The Act empowers people to use the land they own in any way but it also subjects the use to
other existing laws. In terms of forestry, the laws most commonly referred to are those
dealing with forests, the environment, and wildlife. They can also access forest reserves for
user rights but the reserves cannot be degazzetted without approval of parliament.
The Act establishes Land Boards at the district level and Land Committees at parish levels to deal with land matters like transfer of ownership, conflict resolution, allocation of land not owned by any body, and review of compensation rates among others. Most of the powers and responsibilities formerly exercised at the center have now been decentralised.

Because of financial implications that were not anticipated, it was not possible to start implementing all aspects immediately. Therefore, it is still too early to gauge the Act’s impact on sustainable forest management. However, what is clear is that many municipal and town councils are putting considerable pressure on the FD to degazette FRs in urban areas. The law allows this but approval must be by Parliament. No LG has so far asked Parliament for this but they have tacitly allowed the urban FRs to be built up. This is mostly because they prefer buildings to open lands in their urban areas. Again, concrete buildings carry the day over trees and open spaces.

Environment Management Statute, 1995
The Statute creates the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) with overall responsibility to make sure that all parties involved carry out their activities in an environmentally friendly manner. It provides for establishment of LG Environment Committees to coordinate activities at various LG levels.

The Statute provides for voluntary tree growing for environmental purposes by land owners (Sections 39 and 40). However, where the Environment Committee specifies an area as being at risk of environment degradation, the Committee may compel such owners to plant the trees on that land.

In effect, the Statute decentralises a lot of powers to the LGs through the Environment Committees. However, it reserves a right for NEMA to intervene should the LGs and indeed any other institutions and individuals fail to exercise their responsibilities. The Statute links into the Forests Act by providing for management of all forests in accordance with the principle of sustainable development. It establishes a relationship between NEMA and a lead agency in forestry (currently the Forestry Department). This relationship is now not clear because the new forest law establishes many “lead agencies.”

Membership on the Environment Committees does not include a salary. So while most of the LG levels have now put the committees in place, they remain largely ineffective. Again, environment really remains a fashionable subject only during public rallies. Restraining people from cutting down forests or cultivating wetlands (irrespective of the environmental consequences) is still highly unpopular. Therefore, LG political leaders find it appropriate to look the other way if one of their constituents is found violating the environment law. Again, the good intentions in the law have not been politically expedient to implement.

Uganda Wildlife Statute, 1996
The Statute defines wildlife as “any wild plant or wild animal of a species native to Uganda…” Section 4 vests “…ownership of every wild animal and wild plant existing it its wild habitat in Uganda…” in the government for the benefit of the people of Uganda. This seems to centralize management of all natural vegetation under UWA. In practice however, UWA manages wild animals (even on private lands), and really only manages plants that are in national parks and wildlife reserves.
In essence, this centralised the responsibilities of wildlife management. However, section 13 of the Statute empowers the LGs to appoint a committee to advise UWA on the management and utilization of wildlife within the local jurisdiction. Here the committee plays an advisory role. One again, getting the committee to “advise” UWA is often more easily said than done.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM DECENTRALISATION IN RELATION TO FORESTS

Ambiguities in the Laws

As noted, the ambiguities started with the Resistance Councils Statute in 1993. The ensuing struggles between the Forestry Department and the District Local Governments to control FRs have seen:

- Relations between the FD and some districts drop to an all time low;
- Cooperation in forest protection remaining at arms length;
- The FD being demonized at many political rallies, especially during elections;
- Covert support of local political leaders to unscrupulous individuals in their bid to take over personal ownership of FR lands; and
- Persistent pressure to degazette FR lands in favour of other land uses, often by individuals.

The Forest Sector Reform Process

Government took a political decision to reform the forestry sector in 1998, although stakeholders had been discussing the subject since 1995. After the government decision, a sector review was carried out followed by participatory processes, which resulted in a new Forest Policy in 2001 and a new National Forestry and Tree Planting Act in 2003. These instruments provided for institutional reform, leading to institutionalisation of responsibilities for managing forests to four principal actors: the NFA, UWA, the local governments and private forest owners. The responsibilities of the LGs and private forest owners have been vested in the District Forest Services, the forest management arm of the LGs.

The most difficult aspect of this reform process has been that it has taken a long time to agree on the institutional set-up of the NFA and the District Forest Service. As a result:

- Staff morale within the FD has collapsed;
- It has become very difficult to enforce discipline in forest management at field level;
- Opportunists in the private and public sector have taken advantage of this state of flux to wreck havoc on the forests;
- Local communities have taken advantage of their voting power to coerce politicians into supporting their illegal schemes like encroachment on FRs; and
- The forest resource has suffered heavily to the extent that a lot of people are asking whether the reform (which is far from complete) has been worth the damage to the forests.

Financing Sustainable Forest Management

Public Financing

Many forestry activities are being funded by the government and its development partners through projects and programmes. This kind of financing is now steadily being transferred to
budget support and will be spent through basket and sector-wide mechanisms. Unfortunately, forestry is likely to lose out to the education, health, roads, agriculture, and other sectors, which are higher governmental priorities than forestry. This state of affairs is likely to be similar at LG levels when decentralisation of forest management finally takes root.

Notwithstanding the autonomous decision-making powers of LGs, most of their budget (up to 90 percent in many districts) still comes from the CG through grants and donor funds. Therefore, the priorities of the LGs are mirror images of those of the CG to the extent that even forest-rich districts (in terms of potential revenues) are hardly investing in the development of these revenue sources.

In fact, many LGs complain that when the CG, by law in 1998, made some forest reserves LFRs, it did not transfer a corresponding amount of resources (salaries and operational funds) to enable them to take effective management. Since there was little to harvest in the LFRs, they remained largely unmanaged and worse, many became heavily encroached.

On the other hand, a good amount of donor funding is being channeled directly through the district LGs. Forestry has benefited from this kind of funding but it is limited to a few districts with special circumstances like refugees and susceptibility to natural disasters. However, when the new District Forestry Service becomes fully operational, there is more chance that more public funding will go to the districts. They will also be able to collect more forestry revenues than they are collecting now.

**Revenue Sharing with Local Governments**

In 1996 the government allowed the Forestry Department to leave 40 percent of the gross revenue collected from forest products directly at the districts. It was hoped that this would encourage re-investment of forestry revenues directly in the local areas where it had been generated. And if properly collected, the share for the district LGs could have a substantial impact if it was reinvested. For example, 40 percent of the revenue from royalties on roundwood for timber from pine plantations alone for the period July-December 2003 was Uganda Shs. 400 million.

In the districts where there was appreciable revenue from forests, the popularity of the local District Forest Officer (DFO) increased but complaints continued to come from the communities living near forests that they were not seeing the money (FD field inspection reports). After some time, the district LGs started to finance some forestry activities, although the expenditure was mainly on keeping the DFO’s vehicle on road and providing subsistence allowances to a few staff. Today, a number of districts have started funding nurseries at local levels from LG development grants that come from the CG. Progress is steady although the pace could have been faster.

**Community Investment**

Where there were clear financial benefits for individuals, they invested their own resources. In Bushenyi District, the local timber harvesting association actually spends money to track down illegal timber dealers and report them to the area FD staff. They are motivated by the increase in timber prices, and thus more profits accruing to them on sale of legally harvested timber by their members.

In the less obvious cash income sites, there is still need for public financing, in the hope that the people will be eventually be persuaded to see the long-term, less tangible benefits and
cooperate. Given the poverty that surrounds these people, there must be more than just persuasion on the “greater good” premise before they can dig into their pockets to invest in forest management. Income-generating or community projects (like school furniture, a local clinic) have been tried but there is no documented evidence that they inspire good forest management.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

1. Decentralization as a principle and practice of managing society’s business is there to stay in Uganda. Other sectors have come to terms with this way of doing business but foresters are still apprehensive, and the LGs do not trust their intentions of progressive transfer of forest reserves as provided for in the law. The indisputable meeting point of both levels of government will be at the grassroots community. Therefore, activities at this level are likely to gradually remove the mistrust, particularly if both parties focus on improving the peoples’ lives.

2. Land ownership seems to be closely intertwined with user rights. Most people do not want to have only rights to use the forest but they also want to own the land and therefore be able to change land use at will. In pursuit of this objective, voters are taking advantage of their powers to coerce politicians into supporting them in their quest for private ownership of the lands on which FRs and indeed other protected areas are located. LG leaders are more susceptible to this coercion than their colleagues at the center. Therefore, the solution may lie in keeping key forest ecosystems at the center (with the National Forestry Authority). However, more FRs should be given to LGs to make it worth their while to plan and manage them. The current 5000 ha shared among 56 district LGs is not an incentive for them to spend time thinking of how to manage the LFRs.

3. The LFRs were given to LGs in 1998 but corresponding resources for their management were not clearly decentralised. Technical staff remained at the center but the districts could call on them for advice. It did not work. The districts wanted their own staff from whom they could demand services. The FD argued that the Local Government Act empowered them to hire staff but forestry did not come up as a top priority in the face of the financial squeeze they were experiencing. The District Forestry Service under the current law will make it possible for the government to provide salaries to the basic forestry staff at the LG levels.

4. An incentive scheme is needed for private owners of forests. Estimates show that 50 percent of the natural forests are degraded. Investment is therefore needed in restoration work and responsible management of what is still good natural forest. Affirmative action in providing forestry management grants to LGs is needed. Forests play important roles of collective public benefit like watershed protection, soil conservation.

5. On the other hand, some districts are beginning to finance forestry for community development. They are starting to put up nurseries (albeit very small ones still) to supply tree seedlings to local people, often free of charge. If the CG is serious about decentralising forests, it will be necessary to condition some of the grants it gives to LGs to forestry developments like these. This is how it started with the other sectors.

6. The decentralisation process in Uganda is succeeding in sectors that are top priority for the CG. These include education, health, roads, and agriculture. Forestry comes low on
the priority list. The LGs have taken up these same priorities since the bulk of their money comes from the CG. Unless the forests are decentralised together with the resources to manage them, the LGs are not likely to pay attention to them beyond harvesting them where this makes financial sense. Otherwise, decentralisation of forests will remain a dilemma in the foreseeable future.

7. In any case, forests in fragile ecosystems often do not yield sufficient profits to compete favourably with land use sectors like agriculture. Therefore, it will require CG targeted funding, whether through LGs or semi-autonomous government-owned bodies like the National Forestry Authority or the Uganda Wildlife Authority. That is one of the reasons why the authority to hold forests in trust for the people of Uganda was placed at the two levels of government.

8. It is hoped that the ongoing process of revising the Constitution will remove the current ambiguities in the laws governing forests. As earlier discussed, these ambiguities started with the Constitution itself and later got incorporated in the Local Government Act, and the Forestry Policy. This will then make it more plausible for the responsible institutions to work diligently at capacity development for sustainable forest management.
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