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Report by the African Group

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Decentralization and devolution in African forestry

- Decentralization and the devolution of forest management authority are **very diverse across** the African continent.

Different countries are at **various stages and paces** of decentralization (national, regional, district and community levels).

- **Significant progress** has been made in **decentralizing forest management** in many African countries; **very little progress has been made on devolution** of forest management authority.

Positive outcomes over the past 10 years

- Improved forest management (more holistic plans, collaborative management, improved forest cover and biodiversity, etc.);
- Increased level of understanding between state actors (e.g. forest managers) and non-state actors;
- Improved benefit sharing systems/schemes;
- Improvement in livelihood options for forest dependent communities.

Negative outcomes over the past 10 years

- Resistance, in some countries, by the state to give sufficient authority on the forest resources to the local communities;
- Inadequate transparency in the sharing benefits and taking advantage of opportunities;
- Conflicts between various actors/stakeholders at various levels;
- Policy and legislative gaps, inadequacies and inconsistencies, as well as weak implementation of the same;
- In some cases local communities tend to abuse their user-rights resulting in over-exploiting the resources.

Key recommendations

- Forest policy and legislative reforms be undertaken in relevant countries;
- Undertake capacity building and skills development for various actors at all levels, and especially for local forest communities;
- Identify ways for financing local community activities (e.g. establishment of Community Resource Management Funds);
- Define clear communication channels for easy information flow where these do not exist;

Key recommendations

- Recognize and involve women and the youth as important stakeholders;
- Recognize the increasingly important roles of NGOs in forestry work and establish mechanisms for their involvement and accountability;
- Develop clear frameworks for resource ownership (tenure regimes) to promote commitment of various actors in SFM;
- Promote forest restoration efforts at various levels