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REPORT BY THE AFRICAN GROUP[1]

Q1) In what ways have decentralization, devolution and work on forest governance resulted in positive and negative outcomes over the past 10 year?

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).

Whereas significant progress has been made in decentralizing forest management in many African countries as part of efforts towards improving the forest governance processes, very little progress has been made on devolution of forest management authority.

Notwithstanding the diversities across the various countries, there are modest positive outcomes on sustainable forest management. These include the following:

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- improved forest management (more holistic plans, collaborative management, improved forest cover and biodiversity, etc.)
- increased level of understanding between state actors (eg. forest managers) and non-state actors
- improved benefit sharing systems/schemes
- improvement in livelihood options for forest communities

Some negative impacts/outcomes of these processes include the following:

- Resistance, in some countries, by the state to give sufficient authority on the forest resources to the local communities
- Inadequate transparency in the sharing of 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 in over-exploiting the resources.

Q2) What changes have occurred over the past 10 years in Africa in terms   of:

a) Representation of various actors
b) Coordination among parts and between levels of
   bureaucracy
c) Devolution of authority

Representation

This has improved significantly across many countries in Africa. There is representation of major actors/stakeholders at various levels of forest management and use (e.g. policy and legislation, planning, monitoring, resource allocation, etc.).

The following stakeholders were identified:
- Civil Society Organizations

- Research and Academia

- Private sector

- Traditional Authorities/Land owners

- Women, Youth and other vulnerable Groups

- Forest Forums/Local Level Forest Committees

- Religious institutions/ Faith-based groups

- State Actors

However, in many of the African countries, Women and Youth are still not sufficiently recognized as important actors in forest management. Their views are often articulated by NGOs on various platforms.

Coordination

Coordination has improved significantly in many of the countries and this has very positive impacts on SFM. Channels of communication are well defined in some countries. Civil society is also playing important roles in this area.

Devolution of Authority

Not much progress has been made in this area as many governments are yet to devolve sufficient authority to the local communities in the ownership and management of the resources.

Q3) What are the challenges and key issues for:

    a) Governance
    b) Decentralization
    c) Devolution

The key challenges identified include the following:

- Limited or no finances at the local level to support SFM
- Inadequate capacities of various actors especially the local communities
- In some cases there is still unclear communication channels for information flow
- Weak forest policy and legislative frameworks in some countries
- Marginalization of women and youth in forest management planning and decision making
- Reluctance of governments/state to devolve sufficient authority to local communities to own and manage the forest resources
- Inadequate transparency in the sharing of forest benefits leading to conflicts among various actors and lack of trust for the state forest managers
- NGOs are increasingly playing important roles in SFM but lack coordination within the forest sector to increase their accountability

Q4) What changes should we be making to address these challenges and move forward in a better way (Recommendations)?

The key recommendations of the Group are as follows:

- Forest policy and legislative reforms to be undertaken in many countries

- Undertake capacity building and skills development for various actors at all levels, especially local forest communities

- Identify ways of financing local community activities (e.g. creation of Community Resource Management Funds)

- Define clear communication channels for easy information flow / Clear mechanisms for disseminating information where these do not exist

- 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 commitments of various actors in SFM

- Promote forest restoration efforts at various levels