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THE ROLE OF LOCAL LEADERS AND ACTORS IN PROMOTING GOOD FOREST GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is reported that from 1990 to around 2010, Uganda's forest cover reduced by approximately 1.3 million hectares.¹ This represents an average annual deforestation rate of 1.8 per cent.² It means that in less than 20 years, Uganda has lost about 25 per cent of its forest cover. The loss of Uganda's forest cover at this rate has grave consequences for Uganda's economic growth and development and the livelihoods and livelihood security of many people and communities.

The continued degradation of Uganda's forests and other natural resources is increasingly being attributed to poor governance.³ Improving and promoting good forest governance is therefore key in containing the rampant forest deforestation and degradation and ensuring the equitable, sustainable use and management of the country's forest resources. Poor forest governance in Uganda is manifested in many forms including: political interference and influence peddling, poor institutional coordination of the forestry agencies, corruption, abuse of office, breakdown



Private forest cleared for crop production in Kizirafumbi, Hoima district (Photo: Patrick Byakagaba)

in law enforcement and compliance, inadequate mechanisms for access to justice and remedy; and bureaucratic inefficiencies and indecisiveness.⁴ Addressing these challenges requires the concerted efforts of stakeholders and actors at all levels.

Improving forest governance at the local level is however particularly important because it is at that level where illegal logging and most forest malpractices take place. It is also at the local level where many government policies and decisions are supposed to be implemented.⁵

This info-sheet highlights the minimal roles that

1 The Republic of Uganda (2013). The National Forest Plan 2011/12-2021/2022), Ministry of Water and Environment, Kampala, p.vii.

2 *Ibid*

3 See for instance Kamugisha-Ruhombe J (2007), FOREST LAW ENFORCEMENT AND GOVERNANCE: Uganda Country Assessment and Issues Paper, AFRONET, p.ii. See also The Environment and Natural Resources Good Governance Action Plan 2013-2016.

4 *Ibid*.

5 Rametsteiner E, Improving Governance for SFM at Local and Regional Level, in *United Nations Forum for Forests (2007)*, Enabling Sustainable Forest Management: Strategies for Equitable Development, for forests, for people, United Nations, New York, p.9.

local leaders and actors can play to promote and enhance good forestry governance.⁶ Good forestry governance is underpinned by a number of principles. The key ones are transparency, accountability, stakeholder participation in decision-making processes, respect for the rule of law, equity, effectiveness and efficiency. It is mainly from these principles that the role of the local leaders and actors highlighted in the next section is derived.

2. THE ROLE OF LOCAL LEADERS AND ACTORS

There are many categories of local leaders and actors in the forestry sub sector. This info sheet focuses on seven categories of local leaders and actors that are considered key in promoting and ensuring good forest governance. These are: locally elected political leaders (e.g., the councilors and LC chairpersons), community leaders (including elders, cultural and religious leaders), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs), local media, technocrats in forestry mandated government agencies, law enforcement and judicial officers, and actors in the private sector.

2.1 Locally Elected Political Leaders

Within their legal mandate, locally elected political leaders are well positioned to play the following roles as far as improving and promoting good forest governance is concerned.

- Invest in understanding forest governance issues in their local constituencies and raise them in the district and local council meetings for appropriate action. This necessarily requires locally elected political leaders to consult their constituencies
- Initiate and push for the enactment of relevant bye-laws and ordinances to promote good forest governance
- Lobby and allocate sufficient financial, human and other resources to the forestry sector
- Monitor and supervise the technocrats and other duty bearers to ensure that they execute their mandates effectively

⁶ "Local leaders and actors" as used in this info-sheet means leaders and actors at the district and lower administrative levels e.g., sub-counties, parishes and villages.

- Hold the technocrats and other duty bearers accountable in case of delivery failures and governance issues. District and local councils have the power to summon the technocrats and other duty bearers to account.

2.2 Community Leaders

- Mobilize their communities to vote out political leaders involved in and benefiting from bad forest governance practices.
- Mobilize their communities to support political leaders who practice and promote good forest governance.
- Mobilize communities to form community teams to monitor forestry service delivery and collect intelligence on bad forestry governance practices and the people involved.
- Report forest crimes and illegalities happening in your communities to relevant authorities and facilitate the investigations of such vices.
- Mobilize their communities against bad forestry governance practices. This can be through writing petitions to relevant authorities and demonstrations among other methods.
- Lobby political and other influential leaders from their areas (e.g., councilors, Members of Parliament, Ministers etc) to increase resource allocation to the forestry sector and enact appropriate forestry laws and policies to address the governance challenges in the sector.

2.3 Civil Society and Community Based Organizations

- Build and strengthen the capacity of the local people to understand issues of forest governance and empower them to hold the duty bearers accountable
- Conduct research on local forestry governance issues and give options of how best to address them
- Facilitate dialogue and provide platforms where the community members, local leaders (including political, cultural and

religious leaders), CSOs, CBOs, technocrats in local forestry services and media among other stakeholders including marginalized groups meet to share and discuss information about governance of their local forests and agree on practical reforms to improve their management

- Lobby and advocate for enactment of appropriate bye-laws and ordinances to address local forestry governance issues
- Monitor and evaluate government programmes/initiatives in the relevant districts and communities where they operate and in case of issues, report to the relevant authorities for appropriate action.
- Lobby local political leaders to make sufficient budgetary allocations to the forestry sub sector
- Simplify and translate local and national forest laws and procedures in local languages

2.4 Technocrats (e.g. National Forestry Authority and District Forestry Services Staff)

- Diligently execute your duties. That is part of accountability.
- Follow the established law, regulations, rules and procedures in executing your duties
- Proactively provide information about projects, activities, finances, outputs and challenges to stakeholders in a timely manner
- Desist from getting involved in illegal practices such as corruption and abuse of office
- Report illegal practices that come to your knowledge in the course of doing your work.

2.5 The Local Media

- Investigate and expose illegalities and other malpractices in the forestry sub-sector e.g., influence peddling, illegal degazettement of forests, encroachment on forest reserves, and issuance of licenses and permits in contravention of the law and procedures.
- Institute programmes and features

dedicated to educating and raising awareness about good forestry governance.

- Inform the local communities and publicize planned and ongoing decision-making processes regarding forests e.g., applications for licenses and permits, environmental impact assessments, proposed degazettement of forests etc.
- Provide media space where members of the local communities and other actors can write and/or speak about different forest governance issues affecting them.



2.6. Law Enforcement and Judicial Officers

- Police officers and prosecutors should investigate and prosecute forest crimes impartially, diligently and in a timely manner
- Prosecutors and judicial officers should keep abreast with new jurisprudence in the area of forest crimes so as to be able to execute their roles effectively
- Judicial officers should be more innovative in adjudicating cases (Judicial activism)
- Judicial officers should be impartial and expeditiously dispose of forest crime-related cases
- In case of conviction, judicial officers should give strong sentences to send a strong signal to potential wrong doers
- Judgments in forest-related cases should be effectively enforced and in a timely manner

2.7. Private Sector (including companies, SBEs and business associations)

- Pay your fees and taxes in time

- Respect and fulfill conditions in your licenses, permits and concessions.
- Desist from engaging in malpractices such as illegal logging and bribery.
- Support and initiate community development initiatives as part of your corporate social responsibility. This promotes equity which is a key component of good forest governance
- Support and participate in research on forest governance issues and readily provide accurate information to government officials/ agencies and other stakeholders when requested or required to do so.
- Report government officials that ask for bribes and engage in other malpractices under the guise of assisting.



Trucks carrying suspected illegal timber (Credit: ACODE Digital Library)

3. CONCLUSION

Although the primary role for ensuring that Uganda's forest resources are properly managed rests with government, all stakeholders have a role to play. Improving governance of our forests is a task that requires the input and effort of all stakeholders at all levels. This info-sheet has highlighted the minimal roles that leaders and actors at the local level can play to enhance forest governance. Beyond the roles highlighted above,

there may be other roles that the local leaders and actors can play to improve forest governance at the local level. Local leaders and actors are highly encouraged to also play those roles. Local leaders and actors should be exemplary as far as indulging in forest crimes and illegalities is concerned. We hope that the different stakeholders in the forestry sub-sector will find this info-sheet useful in informing and shaping their work, behavior and practices to improve the governance of Uganda's forest resources.