Center for Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM)

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba

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Case Study Name:		**Legal Pluralism and Decentralization: Natural Resource Management in Mali**	
Author:		Benjamin, C.E.	
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Region:		Africa – South of Sahara	
Country:		Mali	
Ecosystem Type:		Agroforestry park/Wooded savanna/Gallery forest	
Social Characteristics:		Rural communities, indigenous	
Scale of Study:		Community	
Resource Type:		Forestry/Agroforestry	
Type of Initiative:		Research driven project	
Community Based Work:		Resource management	

| **Summary:** | Much recent work on decentralized natural resource management has focused on the institutional arrangements that shape the balance of powers between central and local governments. It has given comparatively less attention to relationships between local government and community-level institutions. In Mali, decentralization has superimposed modern legal institutions on community institutions. The ambiguous relationships between them can undermine both the authority of nascent local governments and the performance of customary institutions. Legal pluralism—the coexistence and interaction of multiple normative orders with different sources of legitimacy and authority—helps explain the dynamic nature of local institutions under decentralization. This article examines the experiences of three Malian communities with decentralized natural resource management: one maintains autonomy from government, another engaged its local government, and a third negotiated a multi-stakeholder agreement—a local convention. They demonstrate that crafting workable relationships between communities and local government requires a pragmatic approach to negotiating and institutionalizing political space for innovation in self-governance. |