

Center for Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM)

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba

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Case Study Name:	Top-down or bottom-up? Decentralization, natural resource management, and usufruct rights in the forests and wetlands of western Uganda.		
Author:	Hartter, J. & Ryan, S.J.		
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Region:	Africa – south of Sahara		
Country:	Uganda		
Ecosystem Type:	Forest (moist, evergreen, closed-canopy) and wetlands		
Social Characteristics:	Rural Community (bordering protected area)		
Scale of Study:	Household		
Resource Type:	Forestry, non-timber forest products, medicinal species, land use, surface water		
Type of Initiative:	Research driven project		
Community Based Work:	Resource management		

Keywords:	De jure, De facto, land tenure, wetlands, forest fragments, natural resources
Summary:	<p>Natural resources, and their management, have played an important role in shaping Uganda's national identity since 1986. Through Uganda's decentralization agenda, the perception of unprotected forests and wetlands have gone from being wasteland and essentially ignored in the political arena, to key elements in securing livelihoods and important topics within political platforms. Despite the successes of government decentralization and legislated devolution of rights and responsibilities to the local level, mandated regulations instituted by the central government can remain ignored or unheard of locally. What governs local resource use is a combination of prescriptive national legislation and regulations, local by-laws, and perceived ownership. Usufruct rights of forests and wetlands largely depend on local circumstances, which are unique to individual communities or particular forests and wetlands. This paper describes the entwined recent history of decentralization and natural resource management legislation in Uganda. We then present a case study of local perceptions of access and use of unprotected wetlands and forests in western Uganda. We show that there is confusion among local residents and village leaders with regards to access and use of these areas despite prescribed national legislation. We suggest that better operational success of resource management at the local level could be achieved by disseminating information at multiple levels. This need is particularly pressing in the more remote areas of the country where forest and wetlands face enormous pressure from high population growth and heavy human reliance on natural resources.</p>