



Policy Brief

Governance and Natural Resource Utilization in Uganda: Challenges, Gaps and Opportunities



Executive Summary

Uganda is endowed with a number of natural resources ranging from minerals, oil reserves, water bodies, woodlands, forests, wildlife, grasslands and agricultural land. However, governance of these natural resources is said to be unsustainable. Against this backdrop, Environment for Development (Efd) Makerere University Centre, Uganda held a policy dialogue on the governance and utilization of natural resources in Uganda. The dialogue attracted different stakeholders from government

Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), local government, academia, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), private sector and development partners. In the dialogue, it was agreed that there is need for proper coordination, cooperation, integration and participation of all stakeholders in the governance, management and utilization of natural resources in Uganda and that at all times, there must be a balance among economic, social and environmental goals to ensure sustainability in natural resource utilization.

KEY MESSAGES

Sustainable and efficient governance and utilization of natural resources requires:

1. Transparency, accountability, rule of law, inclusive participation and cooperation of all stakeholders and actors in natural resources.
2. Balancing economic, social and environmental goals in all government programs and plans including private investments.
3. Integrated decision making among all environmental protection agencies and users (NEMA, NFA, UWA, NSWC, UNRA, physical planners, tourism board and citizens) including within and across all government departments.
4. Absence of political and public interference in the management of the natural resources.
5. Independent, capable and efficient well-facilitated and equipped environmental and natural resource protection and regulatory agencies.
6. Changing the definition of GDP to reflect the stock of natural resources in the annual national accounts.
7. Ensuring full costing of environmental and natural resources such as water and other products from nature such as timber, minerals and charcoal, sand.
8. Using technology, social media and press in awareness campaigns and monitoring natural resource conservation and protection in the country.

Introduction

Uganda is blessed with a wide range of natural resources, which provide potential for achieving economic progress if well governed and utilized. Uganda's main economic activity-agriculture relies heavily on environment and nature. The sector currently employs about 70 percent of the total population (UBOS, 2018). Similarly, about 92 percent of Uganda's energy needs are met from woody biomass (NEMA, 2014). This could accelerate forest degradation in Uganda. Although Uganda has a number of legislations and policies concerning governance and use of natural resources, existing evidence indicates that the current utilization of Uganda's natural resources is not sustainable. Non-sustainability is largely due to inadequate planning, policy failures, political interference, limited physical and human capital in addition to less independent and capable protection agencies. Environmental destruction will have an overarching impact not only on peoples' wellbeing but also on the overall

economy and thus the need for the environmental managers and regulators to employ innovative management approaches to ensure that the environment and natural resources continue to support human development and wellbeing into the future. Governance of natural resources largely depends on the social economic and political environment prevailing in the country (FAO, 2014).



Murchison falls, Uganda

Background of natural resource governance in Uganda

Governance of natural resources in Uganda can be traced back during the pre-colonial period to present times. It has undergone a number of reforms depending on the existing political and economic circumstances in the country. In the pre-colonial period, governance of natural resources was mainly based on the prevailing customary rules, norms and customs. There was minimal degradation of natural resources during this period since natural resources were mainly used for livelihood

purposes and not for commercial gains. During the colonial period, there were a number of legislations and ordinances passed to govern natural resource utilization in Uganda. The laws targeted resources such as forests, minerals among others with the main aim of using them for commercial purposes. During this period, many places were gazetted as protected areas such as forests, forest reserves, and national parks among others. In post-colonial era, there was no much change in the governance of natural resources, much of the existing colonial laws on natural resources remained in the use. However, there was scattered use of laws within government departments leading to conflicts and contradictions in the governance of natural resources in the country. In this period, there was centralized governance of natural resources. Amin's time witnessed huge destruction of natural resources mainly due to the government's policy at a time of increasing production due to global isolation of the regime. In 1995, a new constitution was ushered in with a number of sectoral laws passed including decentralized governance of natural resources. Articles 17 and 30 of the 1995 constitution as amended clearly gives the citizens the right to clean environment and the duty to protect their environment. From 1995 to present, a number of environmental protection and management agencies have been enacted by the act of parliament including the National Environmental



Participants listening to a presentation by Dr. Patrick Byakagaba during the policy dialogue at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

Management Authority (NEMA), Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), and National Forestry Authority (NFA) among others. There has been progress in making of environmental and natural resources' laws but effective and sustainable implementation of these laws remain a big challenge. Sustainable governance of natural resources is further affected by high fertility rate, unemployment and poverty levels that force majority of Ugandans to depend on natural resources for survival. Thus there is need to design measures to minimize population growth rate and poverty in Uganda.

Factors affecting sustainable governance and utilization of Natural resources in Uganda

During the policy dialogue, a number of factors hindering sustainable governance and utilization of natural resources were outlined and among them include inadequate budgetary allocations, human and physical capital for natural resources protection agencies to effectively execute their mandates (MoFPED, 2013). Most agencies involved in natural resources management are poorly facilitated and understaffed with limited required gadgets to monitor encroachers and all activities carried on environment and other natural resources such as the Central Forest Reserves (CFRs), wetlands, animal parks and lakes. Secondly, overlapping and conflicting mandates of MDAs involved in natural resource management and governance. This results in duplication of roles between these agencies, especially in CFRs that are managed for biodiversity conservation. Thirdly, some government policies outside the management of natural resources also affect conservation of natural resources and other natural ecosystems. For example, Uganda has a very ambitious infrastructure development plan in its quest to become a middle-income country by the year 2040. The processes for implementing these projects will need large expanses of land, which will likely lead to destruction of natural ecosystems including forests and other natural resources like wetlands and

biodiversity. Forth, indiscriminate cutting of trees for commercial wood fuel (firewood and charcoal) has contributed to the reduction of the total area covered by natural forests and woodlands. Most of the rural biomass sources on private and communal land have already been depleted to fulfil the needs of the increasing population. Biomass is the dominant energy resource for households as well as for small and medium-scale industries such as lime, brick, and tile making and a number of agro-based industries in Uganda. Woody biomass meets 92 percent of the country's energy needs (NEMA, 2014).

Other factors are corruption and political interferences in the governance and utilization of natural resources. According to the district chairperson of Wakiso district, it is the well connected, untouchables and the rich who are at the forefront of destroying natural resources such as wetlands and forests. "Degradation is not ignorant but the powerful and politically connected greedy people who want to over accumulate wealth" said the Wakiso district boss. Porous borders where the poachers or illegal dealers in natural resources exploit to smuggle to other countries forbidden or protected natural resources such as the wildlife, logs and timbers leading to deforestation. According to NEMA, defiance and hostility from some members of the public makes their work difficult. Environmental protection agencies continue to face a big opposition from some sections of the public and other state agencies such as the army and the police in execution of their duties. UWA and NFA have lost a number of staff and other equipment due to violent attacks from encroachers and poachers. Other hindrances included: old laws that need to be reviewed and updated to fit the current circumstances, education system that does not give practical insights on sustainable utilization of natural resources, inadequate staff and funds at local government level to protect the environment and ensure sustainable utilization of natural resources. Poor housing and urban planning that does not take into consideration environmental conservation goals, poor communication and sensitization of masses about the real environmental problems and the associated destruction costs, poor management of wastes, segmentation of environmental laws, resigned citizenry, failure to internalize the full cost of natural resource exploitation and low visibility and discussion of environmental issues. Lastly, lack of enforceable environmental laws on privately owned land and other natural resources.

Measures for sustainable governance and utilization of natural resources in Uganda

A number of potential solutions to the existing hindrances to sustainable governance and utilization of natural resources in Uganda were identified during the policy dialogue. Among them include: allocating more resources to natural resource management and governance. This will help in developing capacity to effectively manage Uganda's natural resources. Secondly, there is need to attach monetary value on existing environmental and natural resources including adjusting the definition of GDP to reflect both the value and stock of existing natural resources in Uganda. Alternative sources of energy should be identified and if possible subsidized such as tapping wind and solar energies and encouraging use of charcoal saving stoves or those that use stones instead of wood fuel. This will save on destruction of forests.

There is need for integrated decision-making, cooperation and coordination of all state agencies involved in environmental governance and protection within and across the government including bringing on board all stake holders and actors in natural resource sector. Legal and institutional reforms on governance and utilization of natural resource that are responsive to existing environmental problems, integration of urban and all planners in environmental governance and utilization. Address lawlessness on exploitation and utilization of natural resources, addressing the exiting economic challenges in the country. There is need for mindset change on environmental users including involving the youth and women in planning and

management of natural resources. People should be made aware of the value of protecting environment and the likely costs of environmental degradation. Proper use and disposal of waste products including plastics, e-waste and polythene bags. For instance, waster products can be turned into sources of income and livelihood. In addition, the government should adopt national environmental days, monetization of environmental and natural resources, coordination and integration of all existing laws on governance and utilization of natural resources.

Other measures include paying people off the environment, having sustainable use of water resources and other natural resources through full cost pricing, recovering and restoring the degraded natural resources such as the environment, forests and wetlands. The media should be trained in environmental issues so that it can be used to promote sustainable utilization of natural resources in the country. Modern technology should be utilized in the governance of natural resources. And lastly, there must be a link among researchers, academia, community, media, state agencies, local leaders and all the development partners involved in natural resource utilization. This will help to create awareness, coordination, cooperation and participation of everyone in sustainable management of natural resources in Uganda.

Conclusion

Effective and sustainable governance of natural resources requires the participation of every citizen, media, state agencies, development partners and all political actors in the country. There must be clear nationally defined environmental, social and economic goals to be achieved simultaneously. More resources should be devoted to environmental protection and conservation and there must be political and public will to support all the efforts geared at protecting and restoring the environment. Both the politicians, media, civil society and technicians should be targeted in the efforts to have sustainable governance and utilization of natural resources. The role of local leaders and the community in the protection of natural resources should be promoted and should be empowered with the required skills necessary to protect the environment including the harmonious coexistence between the community and natural resources including the wildlife.

Acknowledgement

The policy brief was written by Peter Babyenda and edited by Fred Kasalirwe on behalf of EfD Makerere Centre, Kampala, Uganda.

References

- FAO (2014). State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2014. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome.
- MFPED (2013). Millennium Development Goals Report for Uganda, 2013. Drivers of MDG Progress in Uganda and the Implications for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED), Kampala.
- NEMA (2014). Fifth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity. National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Kampala.
- NEMA (2016). State of the Environment Report for Uganda 2014. National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Kampala.
- UBOS (2014). National Housing and Population Census 2014. Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), Kampala.
- UBOS (2015). Statistical Abstract 2015. Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), Kampala.