

Sustaining Forest Livelihoods in an Era of Climate Change: Dialogue beyond “Participation” and “Community” Arguments

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Abstract:

As climate change risks enlarge, the environment is an ever more important framework when discussing global sustainability. In Africa, following the leadership of national and trans-national economic communities, considerable effort is being made to establish regulations and legal frameworks on environmental resource use, based on international conventions and laws. Such initiatives are often undertaken within top-down initiative of “participatory” and “community based” approaches despite these concepts originally suggest bottom-up way. However, such idealistic approaches have been found translated and introduced to regional/local contexts without sufficient consideration for the unique local and social conditions. This then tends to be received in the local context as enforcement or an obligation, that may be cause for local conflicts. It is therefore critical that gaps between global environmental policy initiatives and its actualization efforts on the ground are identified.

Taking examples from tropical forest zone of southeastern Cameroon, I will report on how environmental and rural development policies are impacting rural livelihoods, the social welfare of the local residents, and the forest landscape. I will then attempt to demonstrate micro-level governance challenges from perspectives identified within the local society. Finally, while acknowledging the limitations as an outsider, I will discuss what kind of research and practice can contribute to the positive co-governance of natural resources between diverse actors, referring to the potential creation of a citizen science platform in Africa.