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## **Scrambling for Rights: Renegotiating Livelihoods and Sustainability after Uganda's Forest Sector Governance Reform**

There is growing consensus among donors and conservation minded organizations that forest conservation and poverty alleviation are mutually attainable goals. Proponents of this "win-win" outcome without fail cite improved governance of forests, generally understood as the devolution or democratic decentralization of rights and responsibilities, as a central element of policies focused on conservation and poverty reduction. However, the processes and conditions under which governance reforms lead to win-win outcomes are poorly understood. Examining the case of a major forest sector governance reform undertaken by the Ugandan government in 2003, this research explores how informal institutions have been renegotiated at the local level in response to the national reform, and the implications of changes in rights for rural livelihoods and resource sustainability. Specifically three interlinked questions are explored: (1) Since the forest sector governance reform, how have rights to forest resources and forest products been (re)negotiated at the local level? (2) Has the contribution of forests to the livelihoods of local resources users been affected by the governance reform? (3) Since the forest sector reform, how have forest cover and forest quality changed?

Uganda is an excellent case for studying the potential for governance reform to facilitate both poverty alleviation and forest sustainability outcomes. In response to rapid forest loss and degradation, the Ugandan government implemented an extensive forest sector reform in 2003. With the stated objectives of poverty alleviation and forest resource sustainability, the reform devolved rights and responsibilities for utilizing and managing forest resources on 85 percent of the nation's forested lands. This project builds upon a study of the contribution of forests to livelihoods conducted by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) immediately prior to the forest sector reform in 2003. Quantitative data on livelihoods and forest conditions will be collected in the communities immediately adjacent to three forest areas selected to represent variable governance regimes and forest types in Uganda including: protected afro-montane forest in Rwenzori National Park (NP); privately held tropical high forest south of Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR); and protected tropical high forest in Budongo CFR. The WCS data provide a baseline of quantitative community, household, and market-level data for comparisons before and after the reform. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected by interviewing key actors in the forestry sector to gain an understanding of the processes and outcomes of renegotiating rights associated with forest resources.

This project employs an empirical approach to understanding the institutional factors that influence poverty alleviation and conservation outcomes. It utilizes high quality pre- and post-reform quantitative data; and draws on a large sample in different settings, which allows for studying some of the finer aspects of institutional changes and their impacts. This research has broad impacts beyond the case of the forest sector governance reform in Uganda. A growing body of evidence suggests that forests generally offer limited opportunities to be utilized as a pathway out of poverty. What may be more important is ensuring that changes in rights do not adversely affect the ability of people to use forests as safety nets and for coping with idiosyncratic and covariate shocks, or to support current consumption. In addition, as other nations in the region embark upon governance reforms in their natural resource sectors, understanding the institutional factors that strengthen or mitigate desired policy outcomes for local resource users is of critical importance.