

International Journal of the Commons  
Vol. 7, no 2 August 2013, pp. 339–343  
Publisher: Igitur publishing  
URL: <http://www.thecommonsjournal.org>  
URN: NBN:NL:UI:10-1-114930  
Copyright: content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License  
ISSN: 1875-0281

## **Multi-level governance of forest resources (Editorial to the special feature – Part 2)**

Esther Mwangi

Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Indonesia  
[e.mwangi@cgiar.org](mailto:e.mwangi@cgiar.org)

Andrew Wardell

Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Indonesia  
[a.wardell@cgiar.org](mailto:a.wardell@cgiar.org)

**Keywords:** Decentralisation, forests, globalization, multi-level governance, natural resource management

**Acknowledgements:** We appreciate the guidance of Frank van Laerhoven and Michael Schoon and the support of the editorial team of the *International Journal of the Commons*.

A detailed Editorial was published with Part I of the Special Issue on Multi-level Governance of Forest Resources in the August 2012 edition of the *International Journal of the Commons* (Mwangi and Wardell 2012). The Special Issue is the outcome of a pre-conference workshop organised by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) during the 13th Biennial conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons in Hyderabad on 10 January 2011. The workshop was convened in order to encourage dialogue among researchers and policy makers with regards to structures and arrangements for forest governance given decentralisation reforms, global climate change, and international trade in timber and other commodities. The purpose was to understand: who governs, how and with what effects? Elinor Ostrom delivered the keynote address at the workshop. Her life's work has inspired many researchers and practitioners dealing with commons problems. This special feature, dedicated to her memory,

is a celebration of her contribution towards shaping the evolving conversation on people, forests and the commons more broadly.

The Special Issue focuses on trying to improve our understanding of multi-level governance seen through the lens of forestry rather than identifying how to make it better. As one scholar has noted “The slippage from seeking to understand *how* multi-level governance works to seeking to judge normatively *how well* multi-level governance works is highly pronounced in the literature.” (Stubbs 2005, 69). The Special Issues includes some preliminary reflections on how far we can ‘stretch’ the concept of multi-level governance (which has been strongly influenced by Western European and US researchers and settings) to the complex politics of scale of forestry interventions in developing countries.

The concept of MLG continues to be relevant although it remains a contested concept, “its broad appeal reflects a shared concern with increased complexity, proliferating jurisdictions, the rise of non-state actors, and the related challenges to state power” (Bache and Flinders 2004, 4, 5). Globalization and decentralization, and the multi-scalar social and environmental changes associated with each, are two related processes that create a need for better understanding linkages across different spatial scales and governance levels (Berkes 2008; Brondizio et al. 2009). The globalization of trade and investments, for example, is increasingly generating pressures to convert forests into various land uses such as for biofuels, and timber, pulp and paper and agribusiness plantations. Efforts to mitigate global climate change through REDD+ are associated with global mechanisms such as carbon markets/credits while at the same time requiring the measurement, reporting and verification of forest resources at multiple levels (see Korhonen-Kurki et al. 2013). Both processes create different pressures at global, regional, national, sub-national and local levels, which may influence long-established patterns of rules for resource access and use as well as marketing arrangements for Non Timber Forest Products (see Wardell and Fold 2013). By increasing the number and type of actors, and the diversity of, and asymmetries in interests, claims and influence, these processes intensify the well-known problems of exclusion and substractibility that characterize common pool resources like forests, fisheries and pastures, and may lead to a breakdown of previously effective arrangements for resource use and control. Ultimately, global, regional, national and sub-national influences are all mediated at the local level (Rigg and Nattapoolwat 2001), and where community organisations can play important roles in the provision of services, goods and infrastructure related to the protection and enhancement of forests (see Garcia-Lopez 2013).

It is increasingly clear that multi-level governance of forest resources involves complex interactions of state, private and civil society actors at various levels, and institutions linking higher levels of social and political organization. Local communities are increasingly connected to global networks and influences. This creates new opportunities to learn and address problems but may also introduce new pressures and risks. We conclude by stressing the need for a more complex approach to the varieties of MLG to better understand how policies work as

instruments of governance and to organize communities within systems of power and authority. The continued de-emphasis in exploring power relations in MLG is of particular concern if we are to improve our abilities to define policy and institutional responses to address the problems associated with processes of globalization and decentralization.

## **Part II of the Special Issue comprises three additional articles summarized below.**

The Korhonen-Kurki et al. article ‘Multiple levels and multiple challenges for measurement, reporting and verification of REDD+’ begins from the premise that demands for climate change mitigation originate from the global level yet responses in terms of reduced degradation and deforestation require the involvement of actors and institutions at lower governance levels, from forest users, through sub-national and national levels. Thus multi-level governance concerns are ubiquitous in the implementation of REDD+ schemes. The authors use the specific case of the establishment and implementation of Measurement, Reporting and Verification – a mechanism which involves the determination of baselines against which the magnitude of benefits and identity of beneficiaries are set. The authors find that there is little consensus globally, nationally, sub-nationally and at the community level of the appropriate methods and technologies for establishing reference levels. International verification schemes are complicated, while conflicts are rife over information quality, land cover classification, and relevant data sets are patchy and scattered. Various interventions have been useful in harmonising information, this includes the establishment of new institutions (some with high-level backing), voluntary, ad-hoc working groups, formal taskforces, and the re-orienting of existing institutions. Information bottlenecks are not unusual as strategic actors seeking to capture and concentrate rents obstruct information flows. Informal arrangements and networks can permit flows but run the risk of excluding individuals and groups that are not a part of the networks. Ultimately, the authors suggest that stakeholder participation and representation can help address some of these deficiencies.

Wardell and Fold in the second article, ‘Globalisations in a nutshell. Historical perspectives on changing governance in the shea trade in northern Ghana’, trace the unsuccessful efforts to incorporate a colonial backwater into the global economy. The absence of exportable raw materials, and high transport costs from the Protectorate of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Colony (NT) ensured that the more accessible and better endowed areas of the Gold Coast Colony and the Colony of Ashanti were developed first. Thus, the NT encountered forest conservationism late in the colonial era. Pre-colonial patterns of trade in West Africa included exchanges of shea in periodic local and regional markets. The collection, processing and marketing of shea products continues to be predominantly by women to both meet subsistence needs, and exchange of surpluses in such markets. In the early part of the 20th century, the British colonial

administration considered the possibilities of starting large-scale exports of shea kernels to Europe. Multiple colonial initiatives to develop the global trade were not successful, and little, if any, export trade occurred. Contemporary patterns of production, trade and regulation are contrasted in the context of globalisation in the post-independence era. The government of Ghana has progressively reinforced its ambitions to expand the shea nut trade as part of the state's portfolio of major non-traditional agricultural export commodities. This policy is embedded within the (now) dominant orthodoxy of neo-liberalism, which privileges monetized production systems and private over public regulation. Historically and culturally-embedded patterns of shea production and trade by women in northern Ghana may now be challenged by the emergence of new processing technologies, the emergence of an oligopolistic global commodity chain and the anticipated continued growth in global demand for cocoa butter equivalents for the chocolate industry. The authors recognize the constancy of local three-day periodic markets that have enabled women to sustain their livelihoods and to reproduce social relations devoid of 'boom and bust' cycles, and price wars that have often characterized globally-traded commodities such as palm oil and cocoa in southern Ghana. Nevertheless, the cumulative impacts of increasing commercialisation and world market integration at the national and local level in Ghana, and other West African producer countries, are still unknown. There are risks that this process may result in social differentiation, changes in household consumption patterns and loss of livelihoods, particularly for women.

Garcia-Lopez in the third article 'Scaling up from the grassroots and the top down: The impacts of multi-level governance on community forestry in Durango, Mexico' explores the function and impacts of a particular form of multi-level governance – inter-community forest associations (FAs) that group collective action organizations of several communities – through a comparative study of 49 communities in four FAs in the state of Durango, Mexico. His findings illustrate how Mexican FAs have important roles to play in the provision of services, goods and infrastructure related to the protection and enhancement of forests, and the economic development and political representation of forest communities. There are also important distinctions in services and impacts between government-initiated (top-down) and self-organized (bottom-up) FAs. Conflict and capture also emerge as an inherent part of these linkages which to some extent help to provide collective goods, but also facilitate the continued appropriation of the benefits by certain powerful actors. In discussing the results, the author contends that the differences are partly a result of the distinct internal governance of each type of FA, but that there are also multiple other factors at play, such as style of leadership and the historical and political-economic contexts within which the FAs have evolved. This article provides an interesting perspective to complement an article published in Part I of the Special Issue (Bray et al. 2012). Garcia-Lopez also provides a clear indication of where more research is needed to better understand MLG of forest resources including the factors influencing the success or failure of different linkages, the need to better understand the distinctions

between communities inside the linkage and similar communities outside, and how to determine which types of linkages – e.g. forester, NGOs, FAs – are more effective and under which circumstances.

### Literature cited

- Bache, I. and M. Flinders. 2004. *Multi-Level Governance*. Oxford: University Press.
- Berkes, F. 2008. Commons in a Multi-Level World. *International Journal of the Commons* 2(1):1–6.
- Bray, D. B., E. Duran and O. Molina. 2012. Beyond Harvests in the Commons: Multi-Scale Governance and Turbulence in Indigenous/Community Conserved Areas in Oaxaca, Mexico. *International Journal of the Commons* 6:151–178.
- Bronzizio, E. S., E. Ostrom and O. R. Young. 2009. Connectivity and the Governance of Multilevel Social-Ecological Systems: The Role of Social Capital. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 34:253–278.
- Garcia-Lopez, G. A. 2013. Scaling Up from the Grassroots and the Top Down: The Impacts of Multi-Level Governance on Community Forestry in Durango, Mexico. *International Journal of the Commons* 7.
- Korhonen-Kurki, K., M. Brockhaus, A. E. Duchelle, S. Atmadja, P. T. Thuy and L. Schofield. 2013. Multiple Levels and Multiple Challenges for Measurement, Reporting and Verification of REDD+. *International Journal of the Commons* 7.
- Mwangi, E. and A. Wardell. 2012. Multi-Level Governance of Forest Resources. *International Journal of the Commons* 6(2):79–103.
- Rigg, J. and S. Nattapoolwat. 2001. Embracing the Global in Thailand: Activism and Pragmatism in an Era of Deagrarianization. *World Development* 29(6): 945–960.
- Stubbs, P. 2005. Stretching Concepts Too Far? Multi-Level Governance. Policy Transfer and the Politics of Scale in Southeast Europe. *Southeast European Politics* VI(2):66–87.
- Wardell, A. and N. Fold. 2013. Globalisations in a Nutshell: Historical Perspectives on the Changing Governance of the Shea Commodity Chain in Northern Ghana. *International Journal of the Commons* 7.