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International influence on forest governance in Tanzania: Analysing the role of aid experts in the REDD+ process☆

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ABSTRACT

Forest governance in many African countries is characterised by a blatant gap between policy and implementation. Contrary to studies that explain this discrepancy mainly with deficient budgets and capacity shortfalls, this paper highlights aid as a cause of implementation failure: Analysing the REDD+ process in Tanzania, it reveals how donor experts employ their material and discursive power to convey 'conservation fads' to the country's policy domain, and to shape the latter in terms of substance and organisation. At the same time, it shows how local actors from government, civil society and academia utilise their international 'partners' for pursuing their own interests.

The empirical findings presented in this paper are based on expert interviews and document analysis. Drawing on democracy theory and development studies, the paper points out the implications of aid and related expert advice for young democracies. In the Tanzanian forest sector, a far-reaching effect can be observed: Decision-makers routinely adjust their agenda to donor priorities without necessarily intending to put new policies into practice. While the uptake of 'conservation fads' promoted by the aid industry provides them direct and indirect access to resources, it prevents the emergence of responsive politics able to transform forest management on the ground.

1. Introduction

Tanzania is often showcased as an African poster child for policy reform, particularly with regard to forest governance (Blomley, 2006; Lokina, 2014; Wily and Dewees, 2001). Its shift from a government-centred, top down approach to decentralised, participatory forest management has been widely praised by the international community which commends the young democracy for having "one of the most advanced community forestry jurisdictions in Africa as reflected in policy, law and practice" (Blomley and Ramadhani, 2006, p. 94).[1] Supported by 'development partners', i.e., foreign donors, Tanzania has also been among the first countries that have started to prepare for a future REDD+ regime by formulating a National REDD+ strategy (United Republic of Tanzania, 2013) and carrying out pilot projects to operationalise REDD+ on the ground (Tanzania Natural Resource Forum, 2011).[2] In this context, the country has been lauded for sharing best practice and valuable lessons learned (Larsen, 2015; Royal Norwegian Embassy, 2013).

Despite considerable efforts, however, Tanzania's forests that cover 46 million hectares (equivalent to 52% of the land area) continue to be threatened by agricultural expansion, over-harvesting and -grazing, illegal logging, bush fires and detrimental cultivation practices (FAO, 2015, p. 8; Kangalawe and Lyimo, 2010, p. 990; Kweka et al., 2015, p. 6 et seq.; Milledge et al., 2007; United Republic of Tanzania, 2013, p. 47). According to the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment, 2015, Tanzania lost 372,000 ha per year from 2010 to 2015 which amounts to an annual forest loss of 0,8% (FAO, 2015, p. 14). Hence, while the country is endowed with the largest share of forest resources in East Africa, it is also faced with high levels of deforestation and forest degradation.

In the official narrative, the discrepancy between exemplary formal policy frameworks and practices 'on the ground' is mainly explained

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[1] Leaning on Kapstein and Converse (2008), I call Tanzania a 'young' democracy on the grounds that its transformation "from a constitutionally entrenched single-party system to an openly competitive multiparty system" has started only two decades ago with the first multiparty elections in 1995 (van Cranenburgh, 1996). While Lofchie (2014, pp. 2–3) highlights possibilities of choice under the authoritarian rule of Tanzania's first President Nyerere, I follow democracy theorists who deem political freedom a core principle of democracy (Dahl, 1989; Habermas, 1992; Przeworski, 2010). This was, as Lofchie (2014: 3) points out, not given under the socialist regime.

[2] The acronym REDD+ evolved in international negotiations among the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and stands for 'reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, conservation of existing forest carbon stocks, sustainable forest management and enhancement of forest carbon stocks'. The concept envisages an international financing mechanism intended to reward developing countries for reducing emissions from the forest sector and conserving forests as carbon sinks (The REDD Desk, 2016).

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with deficient resources: Authorities in charge lack qualified staff, funding and facilities to fulfil their administrative functions and enforce compliance with existing law (Kitabu, 2012; Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, 2014, p. 6; National Audit Office, 2012, p. 28 et seq.). In addition to inadequate human and financial resources, the sector is struggling with conflicts of interest and corruption undermining the effectiveness of policies (Milledge et al., 2007). Such problems are distinctive of causes identified by scholars to account for the policy-implementation gap prevailing in many African countries, not only but notably in the forestry sector (see, for instance, Ameyaw et al., 2016; Bofin et al., 2011; German et al., 2011; Kalaba, 2016; Makinde, 2005; Teye, 2013). Finance and capacity gaps, power struggles and 'elite capturing' of benefits fostered by a "techno-scientific framing" (Lund, 2015, p. 2) of forest management are considered key challenges for realising policy reforms, particularly related to REDD+ (Green and Lund, 2015; Leach and Scoones, 2013; Lund and Saito-Jensen, 2013; Kanninen et al., 2007; Ribot, 2011).

While most studies about forestry in developing countries concentrate on internal governance shortfalls, this paper highlights development aid as a cause of implementation failure: Using Tanzania's REDD+ process as empirical case, it examines how donor experts employ their material and discursive power to induce policy shifts and impinge on governance structures in the policy domain. Research from Asia and Africa has indicated that governments react to such external interference with strategic behaviour, trying to defend national sovereignty while being dependent on assistance from outside (Grainger, 2004; Grainger and Konteh, 2007; Grainger and Malayang, 2006; Whitfield, 2009). The study explores how local actors in Tanzania respond to aid and related expert advice, which, as will be demonstrated, is used by donors as a subtle yet pervasive means of influence.

The contribution of the paper is twofold: First, it adds to the body of empirical studies that deal with the challenges of forest governance in developing countries, shedding light on a dimension of implementation failure often overlooked in conventional policy analyses. Second, it contributes to the emerging literature on the domestic consequences of international forest-related discourses (see, for instance, Sahide et al., 2016) insofar as it traces how external experts have shifted REDD+ on Tanzania's national policy agenda and shaped related policies and institutions.

In the next section, I will provide the theoretical background of the study, focusing on the role of experts in international cooperation. Drawing on democracy theory and development studies, I argue that for countries whose democratic transition is still in flux the peculiar risk associated with aid-related expert advice is the implicit conveyance of external constructs and ideas that carry the interests of outside actors into the policy domain of recipient states. This, I pose, is detrimental to democracies as policies that reflect foreign rather than local demands are neither democratic nor feasible, and ultimately amount to implementation failure. After explicating key research questions, I will explain why the Tanzanian forest sector was selected as field of investigation and delineate the methodology adopted for the empirical study.[3] In the main part of the paper I will provide a detailed account of the processes that led to the creation of REDD+ policies and institutions. Following this reconstruction, I will present patterns of expert influence revealed by the analysis and elucidate how both local and international actors capitalise on the 'conservation fads' (Redford et al., 2013) conveyed by aid and related expert advice which, I argue, are unlikely to change forest management on the ground. Finally, I will summarise the findings and comment on their consequences.

[3] The paper draws on empirical material generated in the context of the DFG-project "Scientific Experts in Developing Democracies" carried out at Bielefeld University, Germany. The project resulted in the author's PhD (Koch, 2015). The dissertation entailed six case studies from South Africa and Tanzania on one of which this article is based. While it takes up theoretical arguments as developed in the thesis, the empirical findings presented in Section 4 (except for the historical outline in Sub-Section 4.1) have largely been the result of additional research, analysis and interpretation.

2. Theoretical background: expert advice as instrument of foreign aid

Expert advice has been an instrument of foreign aid since its origins in the late forties/early fifties of the twentieth century. In a seminal speech that reflects the development discourse emerging at that time, US President Truman highlighted knowledge and money as the two core means to end the 'misery' of 'underdeveloped' nations:

> "[We] must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery (…). For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people (…). I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. And, in cooperation with other nations, we should foster capital investment in areas needing development." [(Truman, 1949)]

The rhetoric of aid has, of course, changed by today. The idea that the North is able to 'develop' the South by exporting capital and expertise has widely been abandoned. Under the contemporary paradigm, donors and recipients are considered 'partners' at eye-level who engage in 'knowledge sharing' and 'mutual learning' in order to realise national policy visions based on the principle of local 'ownership' (Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011). Equally, a new emphasis on 'local' knowledge and South-South exchange has replaced the technological and epistemic determinism that characterised the first decades of international cooperation (Cherlet, 2014; OECD, 2008; United Nations, 2015; World Bank, 1999).

Although the discursive shift suggests a diminished role for foreign experts in beneficiary countries, they continue to play a key part in the aid business. With regard to their roles in the field, one can broadly differentiate three types of experts (see Koch, 2015, p. 61 et seq.): 'Representatives' (formally titled programme directors, counsellors, first secretaries or senior policy advisors) are assigned to fulfil a combination of managerial, programmatic and advisory functions. Placed in aid agencies' country offices or embassies, they are responsible for both overseeing funding flows and programme 'progress'. On behalf of their organisations, they participate in high-level meetings and policy discussions with government decision-makers. 'Advisors', the second group of experts, are often 'embedded' within recipient organisations, i.e., they are temporarily placed within these bodies in order to assist and advise their counterparts, usually ministry officials in the highest ranks with whom they are supposed to closely interact. While their main task is generally the provision of specialist knowledge and sectoral expertise, they are also assigned to drive forth ('facilitate') processes by setting up meetings and consultations, preparing agendas, distributing information, following-up actions etc. 'Consultants', the third group, are not involved in such day-to-day activities. Their interaction with ministerial staff is mostly limited to gaining information and access to data sources in order to prepare specific products such as appraisal and feasibility studies, evaluations, expenditure surveys, etc. Their job is to deliver expertise about the status-quo and progress in the form of analytical reports.

While experts differ in terms of fields of expertise, it is noticeable that they share certain features with regard to educational backgrounds: Most of them have advanced academic qualification(s) at master level or higher, often acquired at Anglo-American and European universities (Dietrich, 2006, p. 33; Koch, 2015, p. 57). Given that many start their career in international organisations soon after graduation and that assignments in aid receiving countries are usually limited in time, professional profiles display a high degree of mobility. According to Evers (2005), the dissolution of boundaries in the professional