Barriers to policy implementation and implications for Zambia's forest ecosystems

Felix Kanungwe Kalaba

Copperbelt University, School of Natural Resources, Department of Plants and Environmental Sciences, P.O Box 21692, Kitwe, Zambia

ABSTRACT

Policies play a vital role in setting priorities and actions for forest use and management. High rates of forest loss can be attributed to failure by policies to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. It is argued that in most Least Developed Countries such as Zambia, adopted forest and natural resources policies are rarely put into effect resulting in ecosystem degradation.

This study examined policy actor's perception of implementation of policies aimed at reducing deforestation and forest degradation and their implications for forest resources.

To examine policy implementation, 55 policy actors were interviewed at national, regional and local levels. This included government officials, Non-Governmental Organisations, traditional leaders and local people. Interviews were analysed using discourse analysis.

Findings show that policy implementations deficits are prevalent in Zambia's forest sector. Policy actors identified the main barriers as inadequate institutional capacity, inadequate legal framework, political influences, insecure land tenure, poor funding, and lack of intersectoral coordination. The paper has shown gaps between policies and their implementation. To halt deforestation and forest degradation, it is imperative that formulated policies are implemented. This will require improved communication and coordination among government units and various stakeholders, sufficient resources and harmonizing policies and legal frameworks.

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1. Introduction

Forest ecosystems provide various ecosystem services to local people (foods, medicines, fodder, construction material) and the global population (carbon storage, regulation of water cycle) (Ernst et al., 2013; Kalaba et al., 2013). Despite the importance of forests, deforestation and forest degradation remains a challenge in many developing countries, thereby reducing the flow of ecosystem services provided at local, national regional and global levels.

Africa loses an average of 3.4 million hectares of forests annually (FAO, 2010). Deforestation and forest degradation accounts for approximately 12% of total greenhouse gases emissions (GHGs) and is the main source of emissions from developing countries (Ernst et al., 2013). Studies have highlighted several direct drivers of deforestation among them; expansion of agro-industrial plantations (Tegegne et al., 2016), subsistence slash and burn agriculture, charcoal production (Vinya et al., 2011; Syampungani et al., 2009), fuelwood collection (Ernst et al., 2013), infrastructure development and wood extraction (Tegegne et al., 2016). Most analysis in the drivers of deforestation literature has traditionally focused on direct drivers of forest loss while neglecting institutional and policy drivers that are important in informing policy and practice (Wehkamp et al., 2015). Additionally, past studies on understanding extent and drivers of deforestation and forest degradation have mainly been based on remote sensing (see Campbell et al., 2008) and reviews of literature (Dewees et al., 2010) and rarely include knowledge, information and the opinions of experts, policy makers and other policy actors (Tegegne et al., 2016).

Zambia is a highly forested country in southern Africa with 60% of the total land area covered by forests. Deforestation is however high occurring at 250,000–300,000 ha annually (GRZ, 2008). Zambia being a REDD+ (Reduction from Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) pilot country is reflecting on strategies to reduce deforestation. Wehkamp et al. (2015) have argued that when identifying deforestation drivers, it is imperative to consider the perspectives of actors who are in key positions to reduce deforestation. Understanding of policymakers' perception of drivers of deforestation is an important step towards a more holistic understanding of drivers that are difficult to define, quantify and measure (Wehkamp et al., 2015).

Institutional and policy factors are important underling drivers of forest loss in developing countries and as such must be addressed to effectively combat deforestation and forest degradation in the long-term and effectively implement REDD+ (Tegegne et al., 2016). It has been argued that forest management is hindered by inappropriate policies (Colchester et al., 2006) and the marginalization of the forest sector, particularly with regard to low financing when compared to other sectors

E-mail address: kanungwe@gmail.com.

such as agriculture (Dewees et al., 2010). Further, most national policies are not coherent and are inconsistent, with some national agricultural policies providing incentives for agricultural land expansion in forest frontiers (Kalaba et al., 2014). Some governments have failed to manage forest resources due to the negative influence of other policies outside the forest sector such as agriculture and energy, which directly or indirectly affect the forest sector, and have subtle competition among themselves (Kaimowitz, 2003). Most past forest sectoral policies have followed the 'protectionist paradigm' (Kusters et al., 2006), where policies and laws restrict access of local people to protected areas (Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997; Syampungani et al., 2009) and do not recognise the role of traditional leadership in natural resources management (Virtanen, 2002). These policies gives rise to illegal forestry activities, which are often unsustainable and threaten forests (Kaimowitz, 2003). This is because the protectionist approach is only effective if strongly enforced, while lack of monitoring and enforcement increases illegal activities because it creates a de facto open access resource.

Lack of policy implementation has been highlighted as a key problem in environmental governance (Leventon and Antypas, 2012). Policy implementation is "the carrying out of a basic policy decision" (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1980:540), which involves translating policy decisions into on-the-ground actions, often supported by statutes. Policies consist of outputs (laws, regulations and organisations created to address a policy problem) and policy outcomes (practical management actions stipulated by outputs to address the problem) (Jordan, 1999; Leventon and Antypas, 2012). Central to implementation analysis is identifying factors which affect the implementation of policy goals (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1980). Implementation deficits or gaps occur when there exists "shortfalls between the goals embodied in particular directives and their practical effects" (Jordan, 1999:72). A policy deficit arises either from the failure to meet delineated policy goals or the failure by policy goals to sufficiently tackle policy problems (Jordan, 1999; Leventon and Antypas, 2012).

The objective of this study was to identify obstacles to policy implementation of forest sector policies of Zambia as perceived by policy actors from all levels (national to local). Understanding factors that hinder policy implementation is cardinal to addressing drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and providing insights for improved forest management to enhance forest carbon stocks and provisioning of forest generated ecosystem services. If emerging policy initiatives in forest management targeted at improving forest management are to be effective, an examination of barriers to policy implementation on the ground is vital to inform forest management.

2. Research design and methodology

Expert interviews were conducted to elucidate expert opinions and insights on policy implementation (Dorussen et al., 2005). This method explores the opinions of different experts, which is important in understanding policy implementation (Opdenakker, 2006; Sheng et al., 2009). The policies considered were the national forest policy, energy policy, and agricultural policy. This is because these policies have identified drivers of deforestation and measures proposed to halt loss of forest cover (see Kalaba et al., 2014).

In this study, expert interviews were conducted with policy actors at various levels of governance (national, district, village) to provide policy implementation lessons across different sectors and governance levels. In selecting participants, interviewees were chosen by first establishing stakeholders through the process of stakeholder analysis (Patton, 1990), based on a wider analysis of policies, government ministries, traditional authority, NGOs and academics based on internet searches and prior knowledge and experience of the researcher. The study then used purposive sampling for initial interviews, which was combined with snowball sampling where participants provided contact details of possible further interviewees. Snowball sampling was used as it "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know people

who know what cases are information-rich" (Patton, 1990:175). The profile of policy actors ranged from local users to those involved in planning, financing and executing programmes aimed at reducing deforestation and forest degradation. The researcher used a topic guide, however, interviews were flexible and pursued the issues that were raised by respondents. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), these interviews are fundamentally a discussion in which the interviewer establishes a broad direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondents. A total of 55 interviews were conducted, distributed as summarized below in Table 1.

National level interviews with respondents discussed policy goals in their respective sectors and policy implementation strategies. Interviewing government officers at various governance levels provided insight into policy implementation at various levels and the horizontal relationships in policy implementation. Interviews with local and international NGOs provided insight on policy implementation at local scales, and local peoples' concerns. Village level interviews with residents provided an opportunity to explore policy implementation at local level and underlying drivers of deforestation and forest degradation as viewed by local people. Local residents included traditional leaders and other elderly males and females who were knowledgeable on forest management issues.

Interviews were carried out in English for all stakeholders except for local key informants who were interviewed using local languages (i.e. *Bemba* and *Lamba*). Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. Interviews were evaluated using discourse analysis. The grounded theory approach was used to generate key themes that were identified as barriers to policy implementation by respondents developed around themes that arose repeatedly from the interviews (Stringer et al., 2012).

3. Results

3.1. Policy actor's perception on orientation of policy goals

Interviews with various policy actors from national to local level revealed that there exist policy measures to address deforestation and forest degradation in Zambia's forestry sector. It was however highlighted that there are disparities between what is contained in the policies and implementation, resulting in implementation deficits. For example, despite the overwhelming emphasis by policies on reducing woodfuel use through promotion of efficient production and use of charcoal and adoption of other renewable energy sources, evidence on the ground revealed a lack of implementation. Interviews with district level government officials and local NGOs revealed lack of awareness of alternative energy sources at district and village levels.

Table 1
Summary of expert interview participants.

Category	Description of participants	Number of respondents
Local residents in villages	Traditional leaders, and different forest users (e.g. farmers, charcoal burners, etc.)	15
Government departments	Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Energy, Department of Forestry, Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources.	22 (*National 6, Provincial 4, District 12*)
Non-governmental organisations (NGOs).	NGOs (which were broad ranging covering environment and development)	10
Academics and consultants in environmental management	Researchers from local universities and national research institutes in disciplines of forestry, agriculture and energy.	8