

## SUMMARY

Decentralisation of governance, the transfer of powers and responsibilities from central governmental bodies to actors and institutions at the lower level, is expected to bring some significant benefits to developing countries. Also the decentralisation of natural resource management is regarded by many to be beneficial for the sustainability, efficiency and equity in the use and management of natural resources. Within decentralisation several aspects can influence whether or not the potential benefits of decentralised natural resource management are obtained: In the design of decentralisation, the extent and form determine which actors exercise which powers. In the process of decentralised governance capacity and accountability influence whether or not and how the actors exercise their powers and if they meet their responsibilities. These aspects are put together in a model which is used in this research to examine decentralised wetland management in Uganda.

In Uganda, decentralisation reforms have established local governmental bodies at different levels. Several powers and responsibilities in wetland management are devolved to local actors at these levels. This MSc thesis research studies the extent to which wetland management is decentralised and the strengths and weaknesses of this decentralised wetland management. It aims to give an indepth description of the forms, levels and processes of decentralised wetland management in Uganda's districts. The study has here fore conducted a comparative case study on wetland management in Kumi and Mukono district. It is examined how laws and regulations have formally decentralised wetland management to the different levels in these districts and interviews are held with actors at all active levels in wetland management -village, parish, sub-county, district and national- to examine how wetland management is going in practice in those two districts.

From the empirical research in the two districts appeared that actors in both districts consider the structures that are established for local wetland management and the powers and responsibilities that they have received to manage the wetlands where they depend upon themselves, as the main strength of decentralised wetland management. However, there are some main aspects that constrain optimal wetland management in both districts. The decentralisation reforms have not decentralised all aspects that are of importance for wetland management: the local actors and bodies involved can plan and budget for activities in wetland management, but as far as the allocation of money for these activities is concerned and the legal laws and regulations in wetland management, wetland management is still centrally controlled. Actors at the lower levels are depending on the higher levels for issues as funding, capacity building, assistance in technical back-up and enforcement.

Because actors at the higher level are not or can not meet these responsibilities towards actors at the local level, wetland management is hampered by a lack of funding and human resources; lacking knowledge in management; low environmental awareness of users and local governance actors; problems in enforcing compliance with laws and regulations; and an overall unsustainable use and management of the wetlands. However, despite these constraints it is believed by all actors that decentralised wetland management as it is now has been much more sustainable than central management of wetlands would have been. Furthermore, in the places where NGOs have assisted local communities with awareness raising and capacity building in wetland management by the set up of community-based wetland management plans, local people appeared to be able to manage and use the wetlands sustainable.

To sum, decentralisation in Uganda has transferred tasks and responsibilities in wetland management to local levels but this is not complemented with adequate powers, capacity building and sufficient resources from the centre. Due to this and the fact that the lower governance levels still depend on the higher levels for issues of funding and assistance, decentralised wetland management in Uganda is still pretty much controlled by the centre. However, the results of the work of the NGOs show that it is

possible to have sound and well-functioning local wetland management as long as local actors are supported with sufficient capacity building and awareness raising. Decentralised wetland management in Uganda could work better than it does at this moment if the local governments are provided with more awareness raising, capacity and powers.