

Multi-stakeholder design of forest governance and accountability

Bikoro territory in Equatorial Province, Democratic Republic of Congo

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Context

Forest resources are being exploited by timber companies, who obtained concession rights despite the 2002 moratorium. Recently, charcoal marketing to Kinshasa town (9 million inhabitants without electricity), because transport facilities by road and river improved.

In the context of a fragile state with poor public sector performance and with poorly organised civil society organisations, timber companies, charcoal producers and artisanal loggers have a free hand to exploit forest resources as they wish. The IUCN project "Strengthening Voices for Better Choices" created multi-stakeholder platforms at local, territorial and provincial level in order to promote improved forest governance arrangements.

How can multi-stakeholder platforms improve forest governance?

Platforms with a strong organisational performance and that collaborate at different levels have potential to influence forest governance.

Forest governance issues within platforms' scope of influence

Management and effectiveness – already addressed by platforms

- Information, education and communication (IEC)
- Conflicts managed locally without intervention by the provincial court

Design of institutions and their legitimacy – not yet addressed

- Being able to denounce harmful practices to responsive public authorities
- Adequate law enforcement
- Transparency in tax collection and expenditure
- Acceptance of the forest law as a binding set of rules

Norms and values – shared by all stakeholders

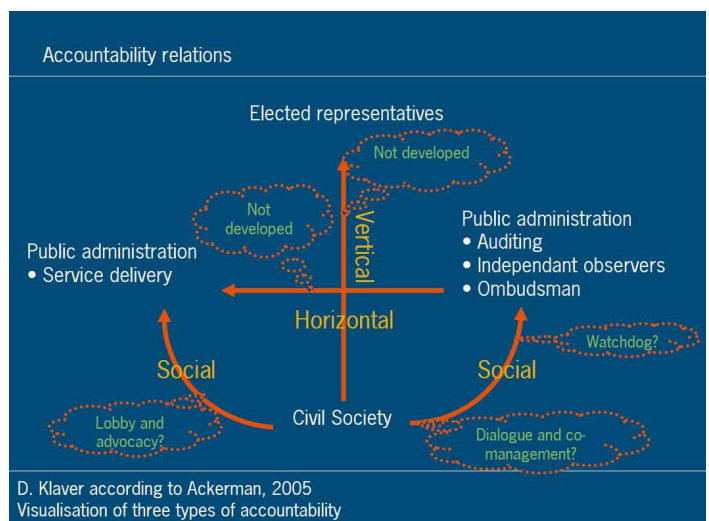
- Equity in sharing forest revenues and resources among the local population
- Civil society participation in decision making

Entry points for accountability

- Local platforms to denounce harmful and illegal forest practices, as well as asking public authorities to respond promptly to reported cases.
- Increasing transparency in tax collection and expenditure. Timber companies have suggested monitoring their tax, royalty and licence payments, and using these figures to verify the accounts provided by local authorities.
- Verifying compliance with the social contract and concession management plans of timber companies. Local platforms have proposed acting as independent observers.

Designing accountability relations

Accountability = "the means through which individuals and organizations are held externally to account for their actions, and as the means by which they take internal responsibility for continuously shaping and scrutinizing organizational mission, goals, and performance".



In the Equatorial province, both vertical and horizontal linkages are absent and social accountability relations provide potential for improved forest governance.

Critical issues for the design of social accountability relations

- What position and role for the private sector? What relations to develop between public sector, civil society and private sector?
- Precondition for social accountability: Respect for Human Rights and minimum degree of Rule of Law in justice sector.
- What is the appropriate administrative level for social accountability relations? Where political, administrative and financial responsibilities have been devolved to local governments or also where deconcentrated levels of public administration are present?
- Linkages between accountability initiatives at different levels (local, territorial and provincial level) are crucial in order to claim accountability and improved governance.
- In the absence of a relevant regulatory framework, define and agree with all stakeholders what illegal forest exploitation; transparency in tax collection and expenditure; compliance with social contract and concession management entails. Also discuss incentives and sanctions necessary to encourage appropriate behaviour.
- Civil society organisations need to carefully choose their position: that of an independent watchdog, lobbying and advocacy, or dialogue and co-management.
- When opting for a dialogue and co-management accountability relation, ensure inclusiveness of all stakeholders.