

**Democratic Decentralisation in the Forestry Sector:
Lessons Learned from Africa, Asia and Latin America**

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Abstract

Many governments in Africa, Asia and Latin America claim to be decentralising natural resource management to local actors. Though in many cases these processes are still quite new, it is precisely the moment to begin to analyse these experiences, assess the ways in which they are unfolding and identify promising trends as well as problematic developments that should be adjusted for the future. This paper synthesises the results of selected research on forest sector decentralisations from about 20 Third World countries. It extracts a set of lessons learned that identify common patterns as well as key factors in success and failure, by focusing on the structure, actors and institutions that play a role in forest governance. To what extent do current experiments strengthen democratic processes by granting local actors, particularly representative and accountable local entities, greater decision-making power in forest management? The studies demonstrate that democratic decentralisation is rarely implemented: substantial decision-making power, resources and benefits from forests are still centralised, and the local actors selected to receive new authority are often neither representative nor accountable. The results of current policies are sometimes harmful to poor local people. The paper highlights the importance of meaningful national dialogue and the empowerment of civil society and of marginal actors in particular. It argues that forestry decentralisations should begin by working *with* local people, building on the institutions that they have already built, and that representative and accountable local governments may be the most appropriate interlocutors for this process.

INTRODUCTION

Local governments are increasingly important actors in forest management. Though decentralisation has generally emphasised social services and infrastructure, over 60 countries claim to be decentralising some aspect of natural resource management (Agrawal 2001). And even where forest sector decentralisation is not part of national policy, local governments and local people often manage local forest resources, with or without formal mandates to do so.

This paper reviews research on forest sector decentralisation from roughly 20 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. From a great diversity of processes and contexts, it aims to identify common patterns and extract lessons learned that will allow us to better understand decentralisation successes and failures. It is not meant to analyse whether decentralisation is good or bad but rather, based on CIFOR's perspective, assumes that *some* degree of local authority over forests is essential for democracy, grassroots development and the sustainability of the world's forests. What that authority consists of, who holds that authority, how this actor relates to other authorities and stakeholders—these are some of the key questions explored in the review of current experiences.

The paper begins with a discussion of key conceptual issues that shape our understanding of decentralisation in theory and practice. The rest of this introduction discusses, in turn, definitions of decentralisation, why countries decentralise and the often unstated roots of conflict over its practical implementation. The next section discusses the lessons learned from the studies reviewed. It is divided into nine sub-sections addressing the following issues: legal and institutional frameworks; financial management; the role of central governments; the role of third party actors such as donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs); local peoples; local governments; the timber industry; other factors affecting forestry decentralisations; and outcomes. The final section makes some suggestions for the future.

Many of the papers are based on CIFOR's research on decentralisation. In Latin America and Indonesia, the studies specifically aimed, among other things, to understand the role of local governments in forestry management. Others, such as studies on India, China and the Philippines, respectively, emphasised the

role of local resource users and the effects of national devolution¹ policies on poor and marginalised groups in particular. The primary resources for the Africa research were World Resource Institute's (WRI) working papers on environmental governance in Africa. These varied in their specific emphasis based on the resource and institutional framework for decentralisation being studied (for example, community forestry in Cameroon, co-management in Zimbabwe). Another important source were the papers prepared for the 2002 Bellagio conference on Decentralisation and Environment sponsored by WRI, many of which have recently been edited for publication in 2004. Additional studies include other research from CIFOR and WRI, as well as from independent researchers.

Though the studies and the nations or regions in which they were conducted are highly varied, each either contributes to the broader understanding of common issues or recurring problems and/or presents a particular puzzle piece that offers a different perspective or important new clue. The results paint a rich picture of both the general and the specific, the common and the uncommon, for better understanding the dynamics of decentralisation in the forestry sector.

Definitions of Decentralisation

Decentralisation is usually referred to as the transfer of powers from central government to lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy (Crook and Manor 1998, Agrawal and Ribot 1999). This official power transfer can take two main forms. Administrative decentralisation, also known as deconcentration, refers to a transfer to lower-level central government authorities, or to other local authorities who are upwardly accountable to the central government (Ribot 2002). In contrast, political, or democratic, decentralisation refers to the transfer of authority to representative and downwardly accountable actors, such as elected local governments. To merit the term 'democratic decentralisation', however, these representative and accountable local actors should have an autonomous, discretionary decision-making sphere with the power—and resources—to make decisions that are significant to the lives of local residents (Ribot 2002). Democratic decentralisation is often the yardstick against which power transfers in practice are measured, and is used as such in this paper.

Decentralisation is a tool for promoting development and is aimed at increasing efficiency, equity and democracy. Efficiency should increase because greater local input should result in better-targeted policies and lower transaction costs (World Bank 1997). As we will see below, efficiency concerns are often the most important, in practice, to central governments. But the equity and democracy benefits (specifically, greater control over livelihoods and a greater share of other natural resource benefits, Edmunds et al. 2003) are likely more important to most local peoples. These are expected to come about by bringing government 'closer to the people' and increasing local participation as well as government accountability (World Bank 1988, 1997, 2000, Manor 1999).

Most theorists now agree that local participation is essential for effective and sustainable natural resource management (Carney and Farrington 1998, Enters and Anderson 1999, Gibson et al. 2000, Edmunds et al.

¹ Devolution is defined by these authors as the transfer of 'natural resource management to local individuals and institutions located within and outside of government' (Edmunds et al. 2003:1), though some people use 'devolution' only in reference to direct community transfers. Decentralisation usually refers to transfers to government bodies. Nevertheless, even if definitions make strict distinctions, the lines become blurred when referring to village-level bodies that operate as a form of local government. Also, with reference to any specific case, there may be a complex combination of transfers to individuals, village governments and local delegations of central governments all at the same time, hence either decentralisation or devolution may be used generically. This study does not aim to compare the strengths and weaknesses of local government *versus* community-level decentralisation/devolution. Rather, it aims to use studies of both to understand the general nature of these many, varied transfer processes. (This paper only uses the term devolution when the authors of the original research do so.)

2003). Because of the failure to integrate local livelihood needs into outside interventions, for example, integrated rural development projects were often ineffective (Lutz and Caldecott 1996) and many protected area projects actually increased biodiversity losses as well as social conflict (Enters and Anderson 1999). National governments are often unable to control the sometimes vast forest areas under their legal authority (Carney and Farrington 1998). And local people often ignore or filter rules imposed from outside; under the right circumstances, they are much more likely to respect rules that they had some role in creating (Gibson et al. 2000, Agrawal 2002, in preparation). Hence, in theory, the institutional framework of democratic decentralisation should also provide the conditions to enhance resource sustainability.

Though the definition of decentralisation does not say anything about the *way* power transfers occur, it implies—and is often conceptualised by policymakers as—a top-down process. But participation and democracy are, at least in part, bottom-up processes. Development that includes effective poverty alleviation through livelihood strategies (Ellis 2000) and local empowerment (Chambers 1997) depend on bottom-up processes. Based on these considerations and what they have found in practice, some researchers have defined decentralisation ‘from below’ to refer to decision-making by local actors without any specific authority to do so (Larson in press), or *de facto* decentralisation to refer to situations where local actors make decisions in a vacuum left by the loss of central government authority (Mearns in press). Many authors argue that some form of decentralisation or demand from below is essential to forging local democracy as well as overcoming central government obstacles to decentralising authority (Contreras 2003, Larson in press, Mandonado unpublished). Mandonado refers to the problems of ‘supply-led decentralisation’ in Zimbabwe, where ‘states enjoy a free reign in defining governance systems’, and the importance of supporting demand-led decentralisation to meeting local empowerment goals. Contreras argues that state-generated spaces are ‘bureaucratically constructed to a point that it limits the process of social and political development of communities’ (2003: 134); these spaces allow for participation but not empowerment.

Decentralisations designed primarily with efficiency concerns in mind tend to be less preoccupied with democracy and equity. In fact, concern with efficiency and cost-cutting is one of the main reasons that privatisation is often confused with decentralisation. Privatisation involves the transfer of powers to an entity outside of the state, such as individuals, corporations or even NGOs, and is often proposed, if not required by multilateral banks and other donors, as a key strategy for increasing state efficiency. As Ribot (2002: 4) points out, however, privatisation and decentralisation operate from two very different logics: privatisation is based on *exclusion*, decentralisation is based on a public logic of *inclusion*.

Decentralisation of authority in the forestry sector is sometimes seen as an all or nothing deal, though this appears more often to be a position taken by opponents rather than proponents.² Rather, it is clear both from community- and local government-level research that checks and balances on powers are needed at all levels of governance. Issues of scale, externalities and public goods make natural resources management particularly complex to decentralise, especially in comparison to the more common development arena of services and infrastructure (see Kaimowitz and Ribot 2002 and Larson 2003a for a discussion of important differences between these two spheres of decentralisation). But their physical location in a particular local sphere—where local people often make decisions about their use on a regular basis with or without central authority—also makes them particularly amenable to decentralised management.

² Nevertheless, the nature of some studies could easily be interpreted to imply ‘more is better’, such as those that measure and compare the extent of decentralisation or devolution (eg. Agrawal 2001, Colfer [DATE](#)).

Why Decentralise: Theory and Practice

Decentralisation reforms in the forestry sector are undertaken for various reasons. One of the most important arguments for decentralisation relates to the historical exclusion of many local people from access to forest resources, in order to promote commercial logging. As Edmunds et al. (2003: 5) writes, 'People living in forest areas... have been expected to cope with sometimes drastic limitations on their choices and to yield rights of self-determination commonly enjoyed by others living outside of forests'. This applies to exclusion from protected areas as well as from the economic benefits of commercial logging, while, with respect to the latter, often then having to live with the effects of related degradation. (Among the countries studied, examples include, but are not limited to, Indonesia, Mali, Cameroon, Ghana and Bolivia.)

In some cases decentralisation policies have begun to right these wrongs, but only because national crises and vehement local demands forced the central governments' hand (de Grassi 2003, Kassibo 2003, Oyono in press, Resosudarmo in press). And in no case was righting these wrongs the primary reason that central governments adopted decentralisation rhetoric or policy reforms.

The most common goal of decentralisation in practice is to reduce costs (Colfer in press), often while increasing forest department revenues (Muhereza 2003, Pacheco 2003), reaffirming private property rights (Pacheco 2003, Beneria-Surkin 2003) and/or addressing central government problems of legitimacy or economic and political crises (Bazaara 2003, de Grassi 2003, Kassibo 2003, Oyono in press, Resosudarmo in press) at the same time. Democratisation may be a stated goal but in reality is sometimes no more than official rhetoric. In fact, some studies found that decentralisation policies actually served as a way to *increase* state control over forest management (Contreras 2003, Sarin et al. 2003, Wittman 2002).

Donor pressure often plays an important role in initiating decentralisation, though specific pressure in the forestry sector is less common than with regard to the service sector. Agrawal (2003) found that decentralisation most often occurs when there is significant elite support within government, pressure from international donors (with financial incentives) and demands from local actors. Local actor demands may not be needed to initiate decentralisation, he argues, but are needed to actually bring about real political changes (see also Larson in press). Donor pressure, however, may result in 'imported' laws that are not appropriate for the national reality (Kassibo 2003). And decentralisation rhetoric may simply be employed principally to appease donors and garner funds without actually implementing any meaningful changes (deGrassi 2003).

Roots of Conflict

As should be clear from the discussion so far, decentralisation has different meanings to different people. These differences often go unstated or even unidentified, and yet are essential for understanding the roots of problems and conflicts in practice, as well as for developing a basis for consensus. In particular, cost-cutting and improving conditions for private investment suggest a very different conceptual framework than securing local livelihoods and building a civic culture for democracy. While the two are not necessarily incompatible (with a clear understanding of the differences, and through extensive negotiation and compromise), in practice they suggest very different political, economic and social priorities.

Meynen and Doornbos (in press) point out, for example, that the same donor agencies often promote, on the one hand, market liberalisation and privatisation of natural resources for commercial exploitation, and decentralisation, on the other, to enhance popular participation and community-based subsistence strategies. Local participation in the former framework may be limited to providing support to local

private enterprise in commercial resource exploitation; these may be the same resources that poor local residents depend on for their livelihood needs. The result of these different priorities in practice is a set of highly contradictory policies on the ground. The authors mention inconsistencies in legislation, tendencies toward privatisation (in the name of decentralisation), conflicts over authority and jurisdiction, institutionalised exclusion of marginal sectors and contradictory initiatives from different government ministries in the same territory. For example, in Acre, Brazil, the agrarian reform institute was establishing colonist communities on the border of extractive reserves established by the environment and natural resources institute (Colfer in press).

Fundamentally, the equity and democracy goals of decentralisation may conflict with the dominant conception of national development. Nicaragua's National Development Plan, for example, which is expected to be a blueprint for development plans throughout Central America, is a top-down vision of development that offers little role for local governments, let alone local peoples, except as consumers and workers (Pérez Baltodano presentation 20 Nov. 2003).³ The plan includes forestry as one of its key development clusters. This development strategy was developed by neoliberal economists with the blessing of the World Bank, and, as one analyst says, it establishes the free market as the 'central axis of national life'. In contrast, he argues, decentralisation is a political project that should develop effective and responsible state power, construct national identity and citizenship and build the conception of democracy as a social contract for individual freedom and social justice. That is, market rationality should be replaced with political democratic rationality, and development should build political spaces, not just consumer spaces, and citizens, not just consumers. (Pérez Baltodano presentation 20 Nov. 2003)

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These realities present considerable obstacles to implementing meaningful decentralisation in practice, but most importantly for the purposes of this paper, they provide a basis for understanding the many stops and starts of the process, its contradictions and highly varied outcomes. As mentioned earlier, in many countries, forestry policy for much of the late 20th century was dominated by national government attempts to control the actions of local people in order to provide optimum conditions for the commercial exploitation of forests. What should now be clear from this brief discussion of contradictory policies is that the incentives to continue to do so have not diminished.

LESSONS LEARNED

This section of the paper draws on the case study research to identify common lessons from experiences of forestry management decentralisation. Each paper emphasises different aspects of the process and may be based on one region or a few selected districts in a single country, or several districts over more than one country. The goal is to draw out the relevant lessons learned from specific experiences without necessarily making conclusive judgements about the whole process at a national scale. It is important to mention up front, however, that the lessons tell us far more about problems with the *implementation* of democratic decentralisation than about the effects or outcomes of democratic decentralisation. This is because, in reality, what researchers have found are not democratic decentralisations but partial, blocked and hybrid decentralisations and even centralisation.

³ The latest version of this development strategy includes a greater share of public investment to municipalities left out of the central plan, as well as the creation of Departmental Development Committees supposedly charged with making public investment decisions (*La Prensa* 19 Nov. 2003). These provisions were included in response to grassroots and local government protest. Nevertheless, they do not imply any fundamental shift in the overall, and much better financed, central strategy.

This section discusses, in turn, the legal framework and financial mechanisms for decentralisation, the various actors involved in and/or affected by current policies, other factors not directly related to the decentralisation process that clearly affect it, and outcomes of the process so far.

Legal and Institutional Frameworks

This section discusses the legal and institutional frameworks associated with decentralisation in the forestry sector. It considers issues associated with the powers transferred to the local sphere and the resistance to such transfers, as well problems regarding which actor or actors receive powers at the local level. Other issues include the lack of legal clarity, the lack of capacity to act on legal rights and institutional frameworks for negotiation among actors at different levels.

¿In practice, the transfer to local governments of significant, autonomous decision-making authority regarding forest resources is rare.

On the one hand, national governments, through their discourse, decentralisation policies or even laws regarding local governments, often espouse the importance of establishing an autonomous sphere of local decision-making with regard to the socio-economic development of each local government jurisdiction. They may even declare the importance of this autonomy or decentralised management specifically with regard to the environment and natural resources. At the same time, specific laws governing these resources, and forests in particular, limit this decision-making to playing, at best, a support role to the central government authority, or mandate coordination with the central government without establishing any specific mechanisms to do this. The result is a legal framework with contradictory laws that establish certain general authority locally but then deny it when it comes to specifics (Larson 2003d), laws on paper that are simply not implemented (Kassibo 2003), or a discourse that is not implemented in practice (de Grassi 2003). But without discretionary powers, local authorities have no legitimacy and are largely irrelevant (Kassibo 2003).

In many cases the central government has out-sourced costs while maintaining control (Edmunds et al. 2003). When some powers are, in fact, transferred to the local sphere, these usually involve responsibility without authority (Contreras 2003, Ferroukhi and Echeverría 2003, Kassibo 2003, Larson 2003b, Pacheco 2003), such as controlling crime and informality or carrying out tasks delegated by the central government. In Mali, the central government maintains control by delaying the implementation of key related activities such as land delimitation, necessary prior to power transfer (Kassibo 2002, 2003). Such delays have also been an important obstacle in Bolivia (Pacheco in press). Where some powers are transferred, the funds to carry out these powers are often not (Bazaara 2003, Beneria-Surkin 2003, Larson 2003b). In Nicaragua as well as other countries, local authorities complain that they have been given the burdens but not the benefits of natural resource management, either in terms of discretionary decision-making authority or income (Larson 2003b).

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What does informality mean here?

Central governments also commonly maintain control over forest management through extensive bureaucratic procedures such as forest management plans, price controls, marketing and permits for cutting, transport and processing (Colfer in press, Edmunds et al. 2003). In some cases this represents a loss of local decision-making authority, subjecting previously more autonomous organisations, such as India's *panchayats*, to central oversight and discipline (Edmunds et al. 2003).

Forest management plans are presumably an attempt to guarantee sustainable forest management, but there appears to be little monitoring of their implementation. Though technical arguments are given in defence of these plans, central authorities make not only technical but also *political* decisions, such as who has access to forest resources and how the income generated from them should be distributed

(Bazaara 2003). Some researchers have proposed alternatives such as setting minimum standards by region, within which local authorities have discretionary authority (Ribot 2002). Elected forest councils in Kumaon, India, have historically operated under such an arrangement. They have an important autonomous decision-making space, within rules and limits established by the central government such as prohibitions on clear felling, limits on the amount of fines and the need to get permission for the sale of certain products. The upward, as well as downward, accountability of the councils has been important to their success (Agrawal 2002).

Only rarely, however, are rights over decisions regarding *commercial* forest resources transferred to the local level, though some portion of the central government's income from taxes and royalties is now often returned to the local sphere (for example: in Honduras, 1-10 percent; Bolivia, 25 percent; Nicaragua, 25 percent, Guatemala, 50 percent; Indonesia, 15-64 percent). In eight case studies in four Southeast Asian countries, central governments retained control over the most lucrative resources, leaving locals only subsistence uses, and thus precluding experiments in sustainable livelihood options. As the authors point out, however, to decrease poverty, people need resource access (Dupar and Badenoch 2002). Nevertheless, forests are usually only devolved to local arenas after they are degraded (Colfer in press). And in at least one case, the state has re-appropriated forest resources after locals have invested in their protection and improved their degraded status, once they had increased in value (Sarin et al. 2003).

There are, however, exceptions. In the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, well-stocked forests were also made available for Joint Forest Management (Sarin et al. 2003). In the state of Acre in Brazil, rubber-tappers obtained access to high-quality forests, though their distance from markets —making them less commercially attractive—combined with the tappers' organised pressure probably made this possible (Colfer in press). In Honduras, local governments can log their *ejidos*, which account for approximately 30 percent of the country's forests, pending forestry institute approval of a management plan; nevertheless, there is a perception that *ejido* forests are more degraded than national forests (Kaimowitz 1998).

Local governments in Indonesia would appear to have the most substantial control over commercial forests of all of the countries studied. In 1999, local governments were granted the right to authorise one-year small-scale logging permits to nationals for up to 100-hectare areas, though this right was then suspended (many local governments continued to grant permits anyway); a 2000 decree established the right of regency leaders to grant permits up to 50,000 hectares (Resosudarmo in press). At the same time, the combination of laws and decrees is quite confusing and contradictory. Researchers argue that the Forest Department has sought to maintain control through various loopholes, such as excluding the substantial area already licensed, maintaining the right to control all pending applications and promoting a controversial plan to make large areas available to state-owned companies (Resosudarmo and Dermawan 2002). At the same time, the state establishes all criteria and standards: classifying forests; and setting criteria and standards for all forest tariffs, forest products and forest areas (Resosudarmo in press).

Whether local governments hold legal powers over local forest management or not, they often make decisions regarding forest resources. This may include imposing taxes or fees in violation of the law, authorising or prohibiting logging, promoting reforestation or simply looking the other way with regard to violations. This does not mean that laws are not important. In fact, the failure to uphold the law may relate directly to the omission of local peoples from receiving benefits legally. Also, legal authority to manage forests may generate its own dynamic. In several countries, such as Indonesia and Mali, local governments have taken initiatives based on their expectations of future legal rights (Kassibo 2002, Resosudarmo in press). In addition, NGOs and donors may begin to direct investments toward building local capacity in accord with new legal competencies (Larson 2003d).

Box 1. Some Examples of Decentralised Forest Management Authority

In Uganda, local governments may have significant powers but only over a very small area. Legal authority is complicated. Central governments control conservation areas and commercial logging in forest reserves over 100 hectares and of trees on all private and public lands (Bazaara 2003). Local governments are in charge of monitoring and vigilance, but there is little clarity regarding sanctions, arbitration or who should enforce what (Bazaara 2003). In one district studied, of 18 forest reserves, 14 were privatised, three were re-centralised and only one (49 ha) remained under local government control (Muhereza 2003).

In Mali, as in Uganda, the Forest Service transfers many powers over some forests to local authorities. Nevertheless, these local domain forests have not yet been specified. The process, as outlined by proposed laws that have not been implemented, allows all higher levels of government to receive forest allocations first, leaving only those of little interest, and therefore of little value, for local governments. Hence local governments may have extensive powers over few if any valuable resources (Agrawal and Ribot 1999, Ribot pers. comm. 16 Jan 2004).

In Honduras, local governments are given exclusive control over *ejidos* as their rightful owners, but all logging must occur according to management plans approved by the forestry institute. They are given other rights by law, but in practice they have no authority whatsoever over the other forests in their jurisdiction (Ferroukhi and Echeverría 2003, Larson 2003d).

In Bolivia, local governments are given the right to 20 percent of the national forest, in areas that are not currently claimed by anyone else or under concession. This area may then be assigned to local associations (ASLs). Both the forest area and the associations must be approved by the central government, as well as forest management plans. The process is long and bureaucratic (Pacheco 2003, in press).

In Senegal, a new decentralised forestry law in 1998 gave local governments important rights to manage their forests (subject to approved management plans), to determine who could produce within their forests and to approve or veto proposed commercial production. The laws were to be fully implemented after a three-year transition period. Nevertheless, in 2003, the Forest Service was still making all key decisions, and rural councils apparently were not even consulted regarding the allocation of nationally-approved logging permits. In addition, in Makacoulintang, when the forestry officer requested the council president's approval for charcoal production, the president, as well as all the council presidents in the region, accepted in spite of widespread grassroots opposition. When pressed as to why, it became clear that they were 'beholden to the party authorities who select the candidates on the party slate and to the state with the power to allocate resources [their] rural communit[ies are] in need of' (Ribot pers. comm. 16 Jan 2004).

Arguments for maintaining central control

There are three main arguments that are heard repeatedly to defend retaining centralised control over forest resources: the issue of scale and public goods; low local capacity; and the interference of politics. All of these do, in fact, suggest areas of concern, yet they are most often used to defend central interests and centralised policies rather than to seek effective, negotiated decentralised alternatives.

De Grassi (2003) explores the use of the first set of arguments—forests as public goods—in Ghana to justify central control of forests over the past century, though without any recognition or admission that

central control has in fact failed to protect forests sustainably. Central government, it is argued, is better placed to take into account scale effects, public service obligations and the protection of trans-boundary and trans-generational public goods, while districts will be tempted to realise the forests' cash value, and the short-term priorities of agriculturalists will prevail locally over long-term national interest. These arguments have been used to justify appropriation of forest resources by the government, elite and domestic and international firms, and are presented in terms of decentralising *all* powers to all forests versus decentralising nothing (de Grassi 2003). There is, of course, in practice, substantial manoeuvring room between these two extremes.

Low local capacity is another common argument for maintaining central, technical control over forest management. Capacity issues, in general, are an important concern that will be discussed further under the section on local governments. In terms of technical capacity regarding forests, however, it is also apparent that these concerns are often simply justifications for the status quo. As one author points out, the obvious response to low capacity is to *build* capacity, not to re-centralise control (Bazaara 2003); another is to retain certain technical decisions, but not *all* decisions. Though beyond the scope of this paper, it is also important to remember that most technical decisions also require certain social assumptions or judgements, and that technical experts have often failed to take into account what is sometimes more accurate local knowledge (see Klooster 2002 for a discussion of the appropriate balance between technical forestry and local knowledge). Decisions that are 'technically correct' can also cause social hardships that may make them socially unacceptable.

In the third argument, politics is seen as a dirty word. Forestry officials often refer to local governments as being 'too political' or the need to 'keep politics out' of technical decisions (Pacheco 2003). What they are referring to are problems such as patronage politics, political favouritism and the unwillingness to make hard decisions that may be technically necessary but socially undesirable. These are real problems that plague local governments throughout the world, but they also plague central governments and forestry institutes. In fact, local governments and other local actors often complain that they are powerless to act against irresponsible and destructive but well-connected logging companies with central government political connections.⁴

At the same time, these arguments fail to recognise the positive side of politics and the potential of decentralisation precisely to build more representative and responsible democracy. That is to say, good politicians represent and respond to their constituents' interests and needs. They take into account social, environmental, economic and cultural concerns within their jurisdiction. They have a responsibility to be transparent and accountable and to promote local participation. This participation may, in fact, interfere with purely technical decisions, but the results should be more socially appropriate. Again, however, what these arguments may often refer to is not a fear of politics *per se*, but simply a fear of losing the ability to keep local interests subordinate to the interests of central government or its personnel.

The means of transfer problem

Powers given by decree can be taken away. In Nicaragua a substantive plan for decentralisation was reversed with the change of the forestry institute director (Larson 2003b). Ribot (2002) emphasises the importance of making secure power transfers, arguing that people are unlikely to invest in rights or new institutions that they believe are insecure (Muhereza 2003). Or they may urgently take advantage of their new powers, such as for logging, for fear they may soon be withdrawn, resulting in over-cutting (Ribot

⁴ An anonymous reviewer of this paper pointed out that these problems fit a Western construct of corruption, but may be seen as legitimate relations of reciprocity by participants. This point makes it even clearer how some central government officials' primary concern may not be local corruption but rather who controls and benefits from patronage relations.

2002). When powers are seen as privileges that can be withdrawn indiscriminately, the bargaining position of local people or governments who receive them is undermined (Muhereza 2003); people fear taking the risk of making demands (Beneria-Surkin 2003).

Authority or responsibility is rarely transferred to representative and downwardly accountable local institutions.

Decentralised powers are sometimes given to parallel committees set up by the central government for that purpose, appointed personnel or traditional leaders rather than existing elected, representative bodies. This is sometimes done, again, in the name of keeping politics out. Such policies may have the support of NGOs who distrust all representations of the state or their lack of capacity (Kassibo 2003). At the same time, even locally elected governments are sometimes not very downwardly accountable; this point will be discussed under the local governments section below.

Sometimes called user groups or stakeholder committees, parallel committees are usually intended, at least by donors, to give local citizens greater direct influence over the development decisions that affect them (Manor in press). This does not appear to occur in practice, however. Manor argues that there is sufficient evidence to raise serious concerns about the implications of these committees for equity and development. Rather than to promote real participation, many public officials use them to co-opt and control civil society; they are set up by and accountable to central officials who, in addition, give them only limited powers (Sarin et al. 2003, Manor in press). Even when members are elected, they also often include or are subject to oversight by government appointees who maintain substantial, if not complete, control (Sarin et al. 2003, Oyono 2003, in press, Baviskar in press). Sarin et al. (2003) write that forestry officers who control such committees in India have arbitrary powers and are totally unaccountable. Control may also be maintained through strict and opaque guidelines and bureaucratic procedures that only the government-appointed members can understand (Baviskar in press).

Community forestry committees in Cameroon were set up too fast and with inadequate guidelines and rules; they had no guidance regarding what they must actually do or indicators of effective operation (Oyono 2003, in press). Rather than adapting local institutions that had much greater local legitimacy and authority, these committees were superimposed on existing social systems. Their monitoring is external and top-down, and they are easily manipulated and co-opted by elites, who often have other motivations besides the good of the community; they have little real power and are cut off from the communities. (Oyono 2003, in press)

The overall effect of such committees has been detrimental both to grassroots participation and to elected multi-purpose councils—that is, local governments (Sarin et al. 2003, Manor in press). They undermine elected institutions by dispersing authority, particularly if they have greater funding, which they often do (Manor in press). They may also take power *away* from elected authorities, such as in the case of some *van panchayats* in India that have existed for decades (Sarin et al. 2003). Even when the parallel committees are elected, the proliferation of local-level committees can become overwhelming, and local people lose interest, particularly when committees have no real power and cannot respond to people's concerns (Mapedza and Mandondo 2002). Manor (in press) argues that these committees should be placed under the control or strong influence of multipurpose, democratic institutions.

In several African countries, in particular, traditional leaders are sometimes selected to receive decentralised powers (Mapedza and Mandondo 2002, Bazaara 2003, Ntsebeza in press). Traditional leaders may be very important legitimate local institutions but they also may be completely autocratic, unaccountable and undemocratic. They may even base their authority on fear and terror. Ntsebeza (in press), following Mamdani (1996), argues that traditional leaders who inherit their posts relegate people

to being subjects rather than citizens. As with the committees discussed above, he argues, the support to traditional leaders undermines democratic structures. In South Africa, central government increasingly favours chiefs for political reasons, who are still the ones able to 'get things done', while new democratic governments are undermined by lack of funding, training and support (Ntsebeza in press). In Mali, even where powers to chiefs are reduced, they tend to remain in important places, capable of undermining elected authorities (Kassibo 2003).

✍The combination of laws and decrees relating to decentralisation and forestry often results in a legal framework that is confusing and contradictory.

Laws are often confusing and contradictory, and it is often unclear which rules take precedence under what circumstances. Ambiguity leaves policies vulnerable to 'the politics of contradictory interpretation' (Sarin et al. 2003: 60). In Indonesia, local governments defend their rights based on one (decentralisation) law while the forestry department defends its actions based on another (forestry) law. Even a single law (decentralisation) has serious contradictions within it regarding forestry authority; and the hierarchy of laws, regulations and decrees is unclear. These contradictions are due in part to insufficient preparation and planning, as well as apparently divergent interests within the central government (Resosudarmo and Dermawan 2002, Resosudarmo in press). New laws intended to clarify contradictions sometimes just make things worse (Muhereza 2003, Resosudarmo in press).

There is also often a generalised lack of knowledge of the law. Local governments may not know their rights and responsibilities; civil society is unaware of the responsibilities their elected leaders have toward them, which affects citizens' ability to demand effective representation and accountability. Legal ambiguities and contradictions make laws difficult to interpret even when the content is known and understood (Larson 2003d). Kassibo (2003) argues that laws should be translated into simpler language as well as into all national languages for broad distribution.

In India, the most empowering laws go unimplemented, and, while national policies protect both livelihoods and conservation, specific laws only exist to ensure the latter (Sarin et al. 2003). In some countries, such as Costa Rica (Ferroukhi and Aguilar 2003), Indonesia (Resosudarmo in press), Uganda (Bazaara 2003) and Cameroon (Oyono 2003), powers have been given to local governments and then taken away again, leading to the instability of institutional arrangements (Bazaara 2003). Sometimes a single, broad-scale law, such as a national logging ban in China, will virtually wipe out the local-scale rights established by others (Dachung and Edmunds 2003). Finally, the superimposition of national laws on spaces that have traditionally been governed locally under customary law or local traditions generates not only problems of clarity but also new conflict (Thillet et al. 2003).

✍Even when legal rights are established on paper, little is usually done to build the capacity to act on those rights.

Both local governments and local peoples need the capacity to be able to act on the rights they are given by law. This includes the appropriate resources, political and technical support, and institutional conditions necessary for making meaningful decisions (Edmunds et al. 2003). Laws should include, for example, the mechanisms for acting on rights, such as for local participation, as well as recourse mechanisms when other actors fail to respect those rights.

✍Effective multi-level institutional frameworks are needed for the discussion and negotiation of different rights and interests regarding forest resources.

A few countries have established local environmental commissions (such as Nicaragua) or development committees (such as Guatemala) that include forestry among the issues they address. These multi-stakeholder committees usually involve actors from different levels of government and NGOs as well as local citizens, operate under the authority of the local government and serve as a forum for negotiation that can then make recommendations to the appropriate authority for action. Far more research needs to be done to determine the conditions under which these institutional arrangements are effective for negotiating forest resource policies and concerns. Participation, for example, without any real power or influence can lead to burn-out, but institutions for dialogue and negotiation are essential for effective decentralisation. In addition, institutions such as these, which are presumably more permanent in time, could help increase continuity across changes of elected, or appointed, authorities (Larson 2003d).

Financial Management

This section concerns lessons learned regarding the local management of income from forest resources or for local investment in forests. Few of the cases studied provided specific information on these issues beyond mentioning the division of forest income among different-level actors. The exception was Bigombe (2003), which was particularly useful for identifying key issues, and which were then confirmed by contributions from some of the other cases. This section considers transparency, accountability and the distribution of forest-related funds.

Several issues that are beyond the scope of this paper play an important role in financial management and should therefore be mentioned. First, briefly, sources of funds for local governments principally include central government transfers, local taxation and donor funds, as well as, for the purposes of this paper, re-distributed funds tied to forestry. There is considerable debate regarding the relevance of how funds are acquired, such as the relative benefits of transfers versus self-generated funds, as well as the total amount needed to be an effective governmental authority. Second, there is the question of financial autonomy: whether local governments can create taxes or set their own tax rates, for example, as well as how funds should be spent. This latter issue is relevant to forestry funds and will be discussed further below. But all of these issues are important in establishing the broader institutional structure of local administration, including the degree of autonomy and incentives for responsible management.

Financial information is not always managed transparently.

Forestry funds include royalties on logging and other resource exploitation contracts, park fees, reforestation fees and various other specific taxes and levies. In general, when these fees are managed by the central government for redistribution to the regions, local governments complain that they do not know what they are supposed to receive and/or that they do not receive the full amount. When local governments do receive the full amount, this has often been the result of a long battle (Larson 2003b), or they do not receive it in a timely fashion (de Grassi 2003, Resosudarmo in press).

In Costa Rica, procedures for acquiring the local share of funds are complex, time-consuming and bureaucratic; some local governments do not even know they are eligible for funds, and many do not bother to apply (Ferroukhi and Aguilar 2003). In Orissa state in India, the Forest Department simply failed to honour revenue-sharing agreements after the harvest; in Madhya Pradesh, locals were completely unaware of rules for budgetary allocations or the use of funds, which were completely controlled by forest department authorities in spite of laws to the contrary (Sarin et al. 2003). These authorities defended their behaviour by arguing that they were responsible for the 'judicious' use of the funds (Sarin et al. 2003). In Ghana, funds transfers are delayed, irregular, subject to central government approval and less than the amount needed and requested (de Grassi 2003). In Indonesia, there are conflicts over the pre-determined division of funds, ongoing calculations and transfer procedures, as well as substantial delays (Resosudarmo in press).

Those who manage funds should be both downwardly and upwardly accountable.

The transparent management of funds, of course, would lead to greater accountability. Public events for the handover of forestry funds to community organisations had positive effects on downward accountability in Cameroon (Bigombe 2003). Where there is some downward accountability, how funds are invested depends on the social composition of the district or municipality and the relative influence of different actors (Pacheco 2003). Upward accountability—not top-down management—can provide checks and balances on corruption as well as undue influence of elite sectors.

There is sometimes little consensus regarding the appropriate distribution of funds among different actors, as well as their use.

Rules regarding the distribution of forestry funds between the central government and the regional and local spheres can be set by central authorities or through negotiation among the different actors. Local actors often believe they deserve a larger share. This includes cases where they were the ones who struggled with forest protection for many years without government support (Sarin et al. 70), where the local share is still extremely low (such as 1 percent in Honduras, Vallejo 2003) and where locals have historically seen central government or elites take everything (Bigombe 2003, Resosudarmo in press). If the division of funds is not seen as fair, the incentive for local actors to try to redress this situation by finding other ways to gain income from forest resources is much higher. This may lead to an increase in illegal logging to get direct benefits, as in Cameroon and Ghana (Bigombe 2003, Colfer in press); a proliferation of legal logging contracts to gain income, as in Cameroon and Indonesia (Bigombe 2003, Resosudarmo in press); or the charging of (both legal and illegal) fees, fines and taxes, as in Nicaragua (Larson 2003b, c).

Box 2. Distribution of Forest-related Funds in Indonesia

There are three different types of forestry funds in Indonesia. The concession rights levy is divided among the central government (20 percent), provincial government (16 percent) and local government (64 percent). Forest royalties are divided among the central government (20 percent), provincial government (16 percent), local government of the producing district (32 percent) and all other districts in the same region (32 percent). Reforestation fees are divided between the central government (60 percent) and the regions (40 percent), with the regional division unspecified (Resosudarmo in press).

There is also disagreement regarding how such funds should be spent at the local level. There is often a generalised complaint from forestry offices and donors that they are rarely reinvested in forestry, though they may go to fund local environmental or forestry offices. Funds are sometimes destined specifically to public works in the affected communities. The most urgent local priorities are usually not forest-related; rather the emphasis tends to be urban and on infrastructure (Pacheco 2003).

Both of these issues, the distribution of funds and their use, should be subject to debate and negotiation, with specific institutional mechanisms established to make this possible.

The distribution of funds to the local level will probably decrease some inequities but create or increase others.

The sharing of funds that had previously been centralised with the regions where logging takes place, for example, clearly diminishes some previous inequities. At the same time, however, districts with fewer or lower quality forests will probably now find themselves at a greater disadvantage than those with forests.

In Bolivia, for example, 80 percent of forest income goes to only 30 out of 109 forested municipalities (Pacheco 2003).

Funds such as reforestation funds could possibly be used to redress some of these inequalities if they are made available on a national scale. Similarly, it is possible that environmental services payments could redress inequities in districts where logging is prohibited in protected areas.

Central Governments

This section pursues some of the problems with central government policy that were mentioned in the earlier section on legal frameworks, as well as discussing the importance of effective and appropriate central government oversight. It also discusses national forest departments⁵ more specifically.

Central governments often block decentralisation or manipulate it to their own ends.

As should be clear from the section on legal and institutional frameworks, central governments tend to utilise various strategies to maintain control in decentralisation processes. These may be overt, such as denying the legal transfer of power to local governments, or more underhanded. The central government is also not a unified entity. When one office promotes decentralisation, another may obstruct it; or when top-level forestry institute directors promote it, lower level officials may block it. Forestry institutes sometimes promote centralisation because civil servants want to maintain their power and income base (Bazaara 2003, Larson 2003a).

Box 3. A Forest Department that Promotes Decentralisation

The Guatemalan case, in some ways, is an exception to the general rule that forestry institutes resist decentralisation. The Community and Municipal Forests (BOSCOM) project is run out of the National Institute of Forests (INAB), and is dedicated to developing local capacity for forest management. In particular, it has aided in the establishment and training of municipal forestry offices in a third of the nation's districts. Nevertheless, by law these offices have virtually no decision-making power, and only carry out the policies generated by INAB for each district. But in practice this is not always true. In some cases, local actors have asserted their own needs and brought INAB to the negotiating table. BOSCOM personnel have become important interlocutors between INAB and the local arena, not only presenting INAB's point of view to local people but also presenting a more sensitive understanding of local points of view to INAB (Ferroukhi and Echeverria 2003, Larson 2003c, d, Alvarado pers. comm.).

As Muhereza (2003) writes, understanding decentralisation necessitates understanding the *interests of the state*. The distribution of powers over natural resources is more conflictive than the sectors that are most commonly targeted for decentralisation—services and infrastructure—because they are sources both of livelihoods and of wealth (Kaimowitz and Ribot 2002, Larson 2003a). Forest resources are a source of tributes of all kinds (Kassibo 2003) as well as national revenue (Bazaara 2003). It is not surprising that central governments resist giving up powers that they believe go against their own political as well as personal interests (Muhereza 2003, Bigombe 2003). Nevertheless, the 'public goods' interest of the state and the legitimacy of state-sponsored devolution arrangements are often taken for granted (Edmunds et al. 2003).

⁵ Since they are referred to by different names in different countries, I refer to forestry institutes and forest departments interchangeably to refer to the central government entity. Forestry offices, however, refer to lower level offices of the central entity or to local government offices, depending on the context.

In Uganda, Muhereza argues that decentralisation is ‘carefully measured to consolidate the base of support upon which the state draws legitimacy and power’ and is actually aimed at prolonging state control over forest wealth. Even when strict oversight is truly for the public good, which it often is not, this does not allow for the development of the downward accountability that is essential for the construction of democratic processes; too much oversight at all levels undermines local autonomy and democracy (Bigombe 2003).

Central government oversight is important and necessary.

Though too much oversight of local governments can be detrimental, checks and balances on local authority over forests are essential for good governance and to protect resources for the future. Though the context is somewhat extreme and case specific, Indonesia demonstrates some of the dangers that can arise from a substantial and abrupt loss of central authority. Local governments have been given important authority over forests in a very specific historical context. That context includes 30 years of marginalisation while central government ‘stole local resources (in the eyes of the Outer Islands) and severe economic, political and social crisis. Local governments, which are not particularly accountable either to provincial or central government or to their citizens, appear to be determined to get from forests what they can while they can while asserting their autonomy and economic independence from central government (Resosudarmo 2003).

Central government authority, then, is also important to address problems such as corruption, forest clearing and the externalities of local practices. Mandondo and Mapedza (2003) also argue that central governments can play a crucial supportive role and help overcome mid-level resistance to decentralisation, as long as there are checks on their tendency to amass power.

Forest department support for the process can help make decentralisation work.

Open communication and a fluid exchange of information between the different levels of government play an important role in reducing conflicts and building mutual respect and local capacity. The relationship between central and local governments was generally identified as one of the most important issues in forestry decentralisation in national workshops on this topic in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua (Larson 2003d). Forestry offices in Ghana, Nepal and the Philippines provide important information to communities (Colfer in press). The BOSCOM project in Guatemala has trained officials of local government forestry offices and helped create a dialogue between the national and local level (Larson 2003c). The lack of dialogue promotes the dispersion of efforts (Pacheco 2003). Without clear mechanisms to promote this, however, coordination remains a question of individual will rather than a political priority (Larson 2003d).

Sarin et al. (2003) point out that forest departments *can be* an important help for technical guidance, handling offenders and facilitating the resolution of boundary issues, but they rarely fulfil this role. Rather, in India, they more often disrupt the effective arrangements that existed previously (Sarin et al. 2003). A forestry department’s failure to work with local governments, however, is not always simply a question of resistance. It is also a question of capacity. Low capacity, as well as corruption (Larson 2003c, Oyono 2003), have haunted forest departments in many countries, and the capacities required for managing forests or designing management plans are not the same as those required for training municipal personnel or negotiating with politicians or communities. Forest departments are also often criticised for dealing far too leniently with people accused of forest crimes that have been identified by locals (Sarin et al. 2003), hence undermining local initiatives to protect forests.

Forest departments generally have little interest in or understanding of ‘the local’.

Forest departments are often primarily interested in forest revenues and timber, whereas forest-dependent communities may have totally different priorities (Sarin et al. 2003). In several case studies in India, for example, Sarin et al. (2003) found that forestry officials were primarily interested in promoting projects that allowed them to control larger budgets, rather than cost-effective, community-based methods for improving forest quality. In fact, one key method for increasing forest cover, as it was historically, is still to keep forest-dependent locals out (Sarin et al. 2003). As we will see below, under the section on local peoples, forestry institutes pay little attention to what local forest management institutions existed prior to decentralisation arrangements—or even actively work to undermine them.

Third Party Actors

This section discusses both the positive and negative effects of NGOs, donors and special projects on forestry decentralisation.

Donor assistance can be key to making decentralisation work.

Donor conditionality or pressure often appears to be an important impetus for getting central governments to implement some kind of decentralisation (though this may only be superficial, de Grassi 2003), and donor assistance at various levels can play an important role in making it work. In Bolivia, Honduras and Uganda, for example, donor assistance has made it possible for some local governments to be able to exercise their powers effectively (Bazaara 2003, Pacheco 2003, Vallejo 2003). In Bolivia, the local associations that have obtained approval of their forest management plans had help from the project BOLFOR; the Municipal Forest Units were unable to do this on their own. Though there are many problems with the NGO project SOS Sahel in Mali, locals are now well-trained in forest management activities (Kassibo 2003). In Cameroon, Oyono (2003) found that NGOs can be key to negotiation and reconciliation.

Shackleton et al. (2002) conclude that external actors such as NGOs, donors and federations, are key to moving policy and practice toward local interests. Similarly, in Brazil, Toni (2003) found that creative initiatives are more likely to occur in Amazonian agricultural frontier areas where there are outside players like NGOs and donor agencies. Where local people do not have the social capital or organisational capacity to make their needs heard, third party actors can be important in expressing those needs more broadly—for example, in defending the interests of marginalised groups.

If managed inappropriately, donor assistance can be detrimental.

There are various ways in which donor assistance to decentralisation can have detrimental effects on the process. These relate to having different agendas than the people with whom they are working, particularly when this undermines local initiative and empowerment; ignoring or failing to recognise the divisive and differential effects of their practices or their funding; and creating dependence on outside financial support. All of these problems undermine local autonomy. In addition, just as governments—central, state or local—cannot be expected to operate only in the public interest, NGOs and donors must also be recognised to have their own organisational as well as personal interests at stake.

Contreras (2003) found that outside assistance generated conflicts in the Philippines when the community vision of forest management differed from the vision of third-party mediators or facilitators. In Mali, Kassibo (2003) found that third parties often promote one-size-fits-all development programs that fail to take local realities into account.

In India, Sarin et al. (2003) found that outside funding sometimes created jealousies, divisions and inequities among villages that received benefits and those that did not. They also generated conflicts within communities over the control of funds. In addition, where such programs required voluntary local contributions, these costs were disproportionately borne by poor women, while the funds were controlled by the male elite (Sarin et al. 2003: 115).

At the same time, donors undermine sustainability by creating financial dependence. In the same study in India, previously-existing and sustainable voluntary participation (by women), such as for the protection of the forest area, was replaced with (unsustainable) externally funded watchmen. It is often easier for local groups to get NGO funds than depend on their own resources, though this is more sustainable (Sarin et al. 2003).

NGOs and donors are often accused of undermining local autonomy by making too many decisions, imposing too many requirements and setting their own agendas; their control over financial resources gives them the power to do this (Beneria-Surkin 2003). In Mali, NGOs undermined elected authority by working with other local groups (Kassibo 2003), a problem discussed previously with regard to the local entity selected to receive powers (see Manor in press).

Sarin et al. (2003) argue that NGOs often encourage dependence in order to maintain control. In Bolivia, Beneria-Surkin (2003) found that technical advisers sometimes failed to train locals in order to prolong their own jobs. In the Philippines, Contreras (2003) warns of the formation of 'a whole industry of rent-seeking NGOs' (p. 130). Though they are often valuable for their 'critical and questioning voice', NGOs co-opted as private service providers, working on project terms, lose that voice (Sarin et al. 2003: 113).

Donors and NGOs with an interest in natural resources and the environment sometimes have a strong conservationist bias.

NGOs are often criticised for their bias toward conservation and the failure to recognise or take into account local livelihood needs (Bazaara 2003, Kassibo 2003, Sarin et al. 2003). The voice for conservation may be very strong precisely in places where marginal groups dominate, such as tropical forest regions, and the agendas for conservation, livelihoods and development do not always coincide (see Larson 2001a). The history of the Chipko movement in India provides a perfect example of a movement for local control that was misinterpreted by outside activists as one that concurred with their own conservation interests (see Sarin et al. 2003). This conservation bias has led to the support of repressive environmental protection strategies (Kassibo 2003). At the same time, the perspective of conservation NGOs may provide an important balance where deforestation tendencies are high such as in Latin America's agricultural frontier areas (see Toni 2003), but the end result may not be fruitful either for the forest or local peoples if they unquestioningly support strict conservation policies (Larson in preparation).

Local Peoples

Local people should be the primary beneficiaries of a decentralisation process that promotes greater local decision-making power, equity and democracy. Nevertheless, the case studies demonstrate that local management strategies are often undermined by current policies, and local participation and accountability mechanisms are often ineffective. This section discusses these issues as well as local differentiation, the importance of social capital and the possibilities of effective local decision-making.

Existing local forest management institutions are often undermined, rather than empowered, through current decentralisation strategies.

Before analysing new decentralisation arrangements, it is important to understand *what existed previously*, in order to understand the effect on local peoples. This is the explicit purpose of Edmunds and Wollenberg (2003), but few other studies have done this in-depth. The researchers contributing to this book found that current decentralisation strategies appear most often to impose new rules and authority over forest resources, either ignoring existing local forest management institutions or specifically attempting to undermine them (Contreras 2003, Sarin et al. 2003). This may be a sincere, if misguided, attempt to improve resource management, or it may be aimed specifically at increasing the presence of the state and its control over certain sectors of the population. Theoreticians of democratic decentralisation, of course, had something very different in mind.

In some parts of India, Joint Forest Management (JFM) brings areas previously managed autonomously under state control. New authorities were created, rather than working with existing elected authorities, and unaccountable forestry department personnel were placed in charge of funds and all technical forestry decisions (Sarin et al. 2003). These decisions were based on the 'forestry department's vision of a good forest' (p. 64). Previously existing local structures were dynamic and adaptive to specific local circumstances, and were demonstrated to be effective in terms of forest regeneration. The imposition of a uniform JFM model undermined these institutions. The new state-sponsored local institutions were sometimes less effective for forests, eliminating incentives for forest protection under local management systems. As for local peoples, a common conception of the new arrangements is that local people are feeding the cow that is milked by the forest department (93); that is, local villagers are simply being used to protect and develop forests to increase the forest department's revenues (Sarin et al. 2003).

In the Philippines, Contreras (2003) found that central government policies were an attempt 'to colonise the spaces' that had already been opened by local initiative and take advantage of cheap, voluntary local labour (p. 130). The new bureaucracy threatens organic structures that were there already. For example, local governments with new authority sometimes enter into competition with community forestry organisations (Contreras 2003).

In other countries, such as Bolivia and Nicaragua, some decentralisation to local governments has occurred parallel to giving indigenous groups greater control over their territories and resources. Where these groups hold important positions in local government, there appear to be few contradictions (Larson 2001b, Pacheco in press), but further study is needed to analyse the relation of these groups to each other under different sets of circumstances (see Beneria-Surkin 2003). In Guatemala, some fear that government attempts to control forest management on *ejidos* is aimed at controlling indigenous peoples (Wittman 2002), given the particularly conflictive and divisive history of that country (see Larson 2003c).

Decentralisation does not always make matters worse for locals, however. In Bolivia, local people previously had no legal right to forests and were forced to operate illegally by encroaching on concession areas; hence new provisions for legal access to forests appease both locals and concessionaires (Pacheco in press). And when local people do not accept decentralisation policies, they are likely to fight back, in one way or another. For example, turning a blind eye, or getting officials to do so, to local 'encroachment' is one way that locals have maintained some control (Sarin et al. 2003).

Kassibo (2003) points out that customary authority that is not protected by law is vulnerable under centralised as well as decentralised systems. Central governments have overridden customary rights in the past, such as through the nationalisation of land or forests (Kassibo 2003). The greater presence of the state through decentralisation may make matters worse (Kassibo 2003); Sarin et al. (2003) argue that the greatest space for local management in India is where the state presence is weak. On the other hand, in some cases decentralisation could still be seen as a return to respect for customary authority, though in Mali it is too early to tell if it will in practice (Kassibo 2003).

Obviously, the spirit of democratic decentralisation is precisely to empower local institutions, not to undermine them through the extension and imposition of greater central authority. Local knowledge can improve central project plans *if given the chance*. Vietnam's national 'greening' program, for example, was based on the introduction of species that were not suitable to many locations, demonstrating a failure to understand local biodiversity, soil conditions, etc. (Dupar and Badenoch 2002). There is great potential for very different results for local peoples through efforts to understand, work with and build upon existing management institutions (Sarin et al. 2003). The apparent failure to develop institutions that would address conflicts arising from the contradictions between previous customary and newer 'decentralised' legal authority suggest that the conclusions of some researchers may be valid: the pattern of increasing control over locals while decreasing controls for capital investment continues (Sarin et al. 2003).

Decentralisation rarely includes effective participation and accountability mechanisms

Mechanisms to promote grassroots participation and downward accountability are essential to democratic decentralisation. They must not only exist by law, but also be implemented in practice; as discussed below in the section on social capital, the local population needs to be organised enough to demand their implementation as well as to take advantage of the opportunities the laws offer. Many countries mandate one or more of the following at the local level: popular elections, participatory budget planning, forums for discussion and negotiation, periodic meetings between local authorities and local people, mandated financial reports, social audits or vigilance committees. Other accountability mechanisms include social pressure, the media, recall elections, central government oversight, and popular protest (see Ribot 2002 for more). Participation, however, is not always rewarding, and accountability mechanisms do not always work. Nor do decentralisation policies include mechanisms to strengthen civil society and hence improve local people's capacity to participate (Beneria-Surkin 2003).

If participation cannot lead to changes in policy or practice it becomes meaningless. For example, social auditors in Cameroon have no recourse if access to information is blocked (Bigombe 2003). Similarly, participation 'in projects, policies and laws that are pre-determined by unrepresentative and unaccountable central powers' is not meaningful participation (de Grassi 2003: 22). Conservation co-management projects aimed at local empowerment cannot empower locals when partnerships are unequal, and the project is top-down, conceived of as 'participation for conservation' (Mapedza and Mandondo 2002, Mandondo unpublished). In Ghana, 'local participation' in forest management occurs through chiefs or government-appointed district chief executives; concessionaires must sign Social Responsibility Agreements, but funds are limited to 5 percent of timber revenues, and signers are consistently chiefs and elites (deGrassi 2003).

Bolivia has municipal participatory planning processes as well as community-based vigilance committees to oversee the local government's financial investments. These committees can request Congress to freeze the local budget. In reality, though, planning is not particularly participatory, and plans are not usually implemented; vigilance committees do not often work and may be co-opted by political parties (Pacheco in press).

Though it may include local participation and empowerment as one of its goals, privatisation may only benefit the entrepreneurs involved, rather than the community as a whole. The Spatial Development Initiative in the Mkambati region of South Africa was based on a privatisation logic that completely ignored fundamental local issues, such as an important land tenure conflict over the area selected for eco-tourism development. The project has stalled, blocked by local conflicts (Cousins and Kepe in press).

In the context of decentralisation and increasing the power of local governments, one important arena for participation is to run for local political office. Not all groups may consider this to be an option, however.

Some indigenous groups shy away from political participation, in part because running for office requires political party affiliation. To some groups, such as the Guarani in Bolivia, party politics is seen as meaning political favouritism and providing jobs to party members, and there is little cultural fit between the Guarani's decision-making traditions and the nature and rhythm of political decision-making (Beneria-Surkin 2003: 231-2). Political positions are also frequently inaccessible to women.⁶

In China, the accountability of local elected (village) governments depend on how well organised and energetic community members are (Dachung and Edmunds 2003). Where leaders are not elected, of course, there is sometimes very little accountability (Xu and Ribot in press).

Without representation, accountability or participation, local people will always find ways to assert their claims, through the failure to carry out instructions, manipulating rules, illegal logging or even burning down the forest. With effective democratic decentralisation, this would not be necessary. Mandondo and Mapedza (2003) argue that democratic decentralisation should entail 'the forging of strategic compromises that firmly secure the interests of the most disadvantaged groups with outcomes regularly reviewed'. These reviews must include the power to reverse or realign governance arrangements to better meet intended goals. Who should do the reviewing and make decisions about these arrangements depends on the specific circumstances. Accountability mechanisms should include legal recourse through an effective, unbiased and accessible court system that people understand (Dupar and Badenoch 2002).⁷

Local communities are differentiated.

In their work with local communities, central and local governments, NGOs and donors may fail to recognise local differentiation. Marginalised groups may include women, youth, lower caste groups, indigenous peoples and immigrants (Kassibo 2003). Even when decentralisation includes real local participation in decision-making, for example, there are often groups that are left out. In Indonesia, for example, there are rising ethnic tensions as some groups claim to represent 'the local' over others, particularly older residents versus newer immigrants (Peluso 2002, Resosudarmo and Dermawan 2002). Many researchers have begun to argue that disadvantaged groups need direct involvement and empowerment, rather than indirect representation, unless there are specific mechanisms to assure the accountability of representatives to these groups (Edmunds et al. 2003). For example, promoting women's participation through activities to raise self-confidence and providing special channels for articulating concerns has had some success in Northeast Cambodia (Dupar and Badenoch 2002).

Local social capital as well as networks with outsiders are essential for making decentralisation work.

Organised and effective local demand are essential to overcoming state resistance and obtaining real power transfers (Agrawal 2002, Muhereza 2003, Toni 2003, Baviskar in press, Larson in press, Pacheco in press), to defending local interests and taking advantage of new opportunities that are presented through decentralisation policies. A study of the role of different kinds of social capital in the Philippines found that strong social capital together with support from local governments and civil society organisations led to the most effective implementation of forest devolution; local social capital alone was

⁶ See Sithole (2004) for an excellent analysis of women's participation in formal and informal decision-making structures, based on a study of a joint forestry management project in Zimbabwe.

⁷ How do we get such courts? The first step is to guarantee that the courts—starting with the Supreme Court—are formed through mechanisms that promote professionalism and limit political clientelism. In El Salvador, for example, a system limiting the role of the legislature to voting for proposed candidates to the Supreme Court, rather than proposing candidates, was intended to do just that. Half the candidates presented to the legislature are elected by the national Lawyer's Guild by secret ballot and the other half by the National Legal Council (*La Prensa* 7 February 2004).

important for resisting centralisation; and social capital involving ties with civil society and government was important for building co-operation for more effective advocacy (Magno 2001).

Shackleton et al. (2002) found that organisational capacity and political capital led to better outcomes through resource mobilisation and negotiation. Dupar and Badenoch (2002: 54) came to the same conclusion after analysing eight case studies from Southeast Asia: 'clear demands for representation and good performance in government, and that mobilise around common goals and objectives, best exploit the potential of decentralisation processes'. Social capital was a key variable in a community's ability to defend its own interests when faced with state efforts to build its own version of community forestry in the Philippines (Contreras 2003).

Social capital can favour some local actors over others, however. In China, social capital in terms of people's connections to government through family networks increase a household's ability to make demands, but families who do not have these ties are at a disadvantage (Dachung and Edmunds 2003).

The right kind of social capital is needed to allow people, particularly marginalised or subaltern groups, to speak out. Several communities in Madhya Pradesh, India, unable or unwilling to make demands on state administrators or even on their own elected committee members, have become collaborators in the charade of success of a prominent decentralised Watershed Management project. This is particularly true of certain community members who benefited economically from the project and/or participated in corruption. Local people can be demobilised by the experience and expectation that nothing will ever really change as well as by the risk that speaking out might bring reprisals (Baviskar in press).

Locals can also be effectively demobilised through repression, weakness and divisions in local organisations, chieftancy disputes, discourses of rural self-discipline and obedience, and threats of violence, as well as narratives of environmental change and who is to blame (deGrassi 2003). In societies that are fragmented due to the previous power of traditional authorities, where individual competition has flourished, decentralisation programs, such as community forestry in Cameroon, will suffer unless these problems of social capital are addressed (Oyono 2003).

Local people and their leaders may accept policies detrimental to them and their resources due to lack of information, bordering on deliberate deception (Sarin et al. 2003). Logging companies, in particular, are often able to manipulate local peoples (Resosudarmo and Dermawan 2002, Resosudarmo in press). Communities that lack information and outside support in negotiating contracts with logging companies and timber brokers tend to receive a small share of benefits and are unable to enforce the contracts (Barr et al. 2001). Effective networks with supportive outside actors could help local people prevent these kinds of abuses.

One way to build such networks would be through the federation of local organisations. This would allow for a better support system at the village level as well as a collective voice for broader scale negotiations and conflicts (Sarin et al. 2003). Nevertheless, this scaling-up of local organisations can exacerbate the problems of differentiation mentioned above. In part due to the costs of leadership, only wealthier and better-connected community members are usually able to take on these kinds of responsibilities; it also may be more difficult to create effective downward accountability mechanisms (Sarin et al. 2003).

Local people are more likely to follow their own rules.

There are few studies in the cases here that demonstrate decentralisations where local people are, in fact, actively involved in making rules for resource use. The exception is Kumaon, India. Agrawal (2002, in preparation) finds that local people are self-regulatory, accepting the need for rules and their enforcement.

Their acceptance is tied to their participation both in the rule-making process and in enforcement strategies. Where they directly contribute to the park guard's salary, for example, they are much less likely to break the rules. Difficulties in enforcement arise when there are not sufficient forests, villages are either very small or very large, levels of migration are very high and when government officials provide little or no support (Agrawal 2002). Colfer (in press) finds that where devolution is greater, local people tend to understand their formal rights and responsibilities more clearly.

Local Governments

Local governments have become key interlocutors in the local arena, but they may not always be representative or accountable to their constituents. This section discusses this problem as well as issues regarding motivation in forestry and the bias toward economic benefits, capacity concerns, and the problems that may arise when local people *oppose* sustainable resource management. Finally, it discusses the importance of local government associations.

Local governments may be representative authorities, accountable to their constituents, or they may constitute another local interest group in competition for forest resources.

Decentralisation should lead to a strengthening of local governments *in order to* increase participation and democracy, not simply to create a new local interest group in competition for resources. Where local governments are receiving additional authority over forest resource management, their downward accountability is essential to effective democratic decentralisation. Without it, increasing powers to local governments may result, instead, in competition with local resource users and even decreased power for locals (Bigombé 2003).

One important problem with elected local governments is the dependence on elections as the primary accountability mechanism. Throughout the case studies, there are complaints about electoral accountability. Most often, it appears that candidates are chosen by national political parties, and local candidates who are not party members are only eligible to run in a few countries (such as Uganda and Guatemala). In Senegal, nationally registered parties must present all candidates and the winner takes all; one fourth of the representatives are chosen by a council of state-organised coops and associations. There is often little competition, and candidates are simply designated by national assembly deputies (Agrawal and Ribot 1999). In Indonesia, Nicaragua, Honduras, Bolivia, and others, people vote for parties, not people (Larson 2003b, Pacheco 2003, Vallejo 2003, Resosudarmo in press). Zimbabwe has a one-party system. Similar to Senegal, a third to a fourth of the representatives, depending on the entity, are reserved for certain groups, such as women and youth; but in reality these positions are simply filled by the leaders of those sections of the state party (Mandondo and Mapedza 2003). To improve representation and accountability, elections must be transparent, with third party monitoring, credible oppositions, vibrant local media, active civil society and vigilant local citizens (Mandondo and Mapedza 2003). In contrast, in Kumaon, India, candidates are selected among residents and can be removed if people are unhappy with the way they are making decisions (Agrawal and Ribot 1999).

In some cases, mayors are very powerful and not even sufficiently accountable to municipal councils, let alone the population of the municipality (Toni 2003). They may be against extractive reserves or the delimitation of indigenous territories (Toni 2003). In Bolivia, where mayors can be removed annually by the council through 'constructive censure' for poor performance, their removal is often political and not based on performance at all (Pacheco in press). In one study in Indonesia, researchers found that 'almost no district government officials are accountable to district residents through direct elections, open meetings, public records, an independent press and the like' (Barr et al. 2001: 53).

There is clearly a need for both more democratic electoral institutions and multiple accountability mechanisms, including disciplinary action in case of abuses or serious ineffectiveness (Kassibo 2003). The degree of accountability of local governments and village committees is key to outcomes in China (Dachung and Edmunds 2003). At times, local governments compete with locals for revenues; in other cases they use resources in favour of some residents over others. In China, even appointed local officials can sometimes be held accountable through personal networks and pressure, as well as fiscal incentives that encourage them to 'do the right thing'. Where these officials have no obligation to local farmers, there is greater degradation, and local forest users suffer greater hardship (Dachung and Edmunds 2003).

With decentralisation in Zimbabwe, power becomes 're-centralised' or re-concentrated at the local government level, with little or no space for community interests; separate structures at the village and multi-village level have no say over decisions made at district government level, and downward accountability at all levels is a problem (Mandondo and Mapedza 2003). In the Philippines, local governments have become competitors, in some cases, with existing community forestry projects. In the name of equity, they provide development benefits to those outside of the projects, but the projects were originally developed to address existing inequities by serving those most in need; in other words, the government is apparently providing benefits to privileged locals. Also, some local governments tax investments on lands, which, since the lands are not privately owned, discourages investment (Contreras 2003).

Nevertheless, when there are good relations between local government and community forestry institutions, there is positive cooperation for social development projects, and in one case, an indigenous local government with a high level of local trust served as an effective mediator between the central government and the community (Contreras 2003). Local governments in Bolivia helped some local associations lobby to make special arrangements for obtaining permits before all legal requirements could be met to the letter (Pacheco 2003).

Local governments can play an important role in localising national policy by adapting the details of national projects or policies to local management practices, environmental conditions and social relations, particularly where national minorities control local government (Dachung and Edmunds 2003). They can also resolve boundary conflicts, establish local industry to increase value added, help locals increase their technical capacity and provide market information (Dachung and Edmunds 2003).

Local governments often have little motivation to take forest-related initiatives, especially when they have little real authority over, and receive few benefits from, forest resources; when they do, these initiatives tend to emphasise obtaining economic benefits.

It is important to remember that in the majority of cases studied, local governments have little effective authority over forest resources, or they have authority only over small areas. It is therefore difficult to determine how they would behave if they were given greater discretionary powers. Currently, however, the motivation to undertake forest-related initiatives or invest in forests tends to be low, though this is not always the case.

One problem is the framing of forestry issues in terms of conservation. In their Southeast Asian studies, Dupar and Badenoch (2002) found that local citizens are more likely to choose candidates for elections based on those who appear most likely to improve their material well-being, hence those who promise local economic development, not conservation. In many cases 'development' is seen as a priority over 'environment' (Bazaara 2003), and forests are seen as part of the latter. Development, by many citizens and local governments, is understood as investments in services and infrastructure (Larson 2002).

An important disincentive currently is that local governments are often expected to incur costs for forest protection or monitoring for and from which they receive no compensation. They are unwilling to dedicate scarce financial resources to forestry when the majority of income from forests goes to the central government. In these cases they only invest funds that are provided by donors or special central government programs (Bazaara 2003). In Bolivia local governments are more likely to control forest clearing than illegal logging probably because they receive greater income from permits for the former (Pacheco in press). Another important disincentive to forest protection and monitoring is identifying or catching perpetrators, reporting them to the appropriate authorities (often the forest department) and then watching them go free.

There are exceptions to this apparent lack of motivation, of course. Some local governments have formed forestry or environmental offices when they were neither mandated nor received funds to do so; rather they sought out funding for this purpose. In Bolivia, some local governments established forestry offices before national funds became available (Pacheco 2003). A few Costa Rican municipalities have also begun or maintained environment offices on their own initiative (Ferrouhki and Aguilar 2003). In several Guatemalan municipalities, local people have demanded forest protection, and in one case they forced the local government to re-open its local forestry office (Alvarado pers. comm.).

In many cases, local governments are primarily interested in the financial benefits of forest management. In the Philippines, for example, local governments are interested in political or fiscal benefits as a conduit for patronage relations (Contreras 2003). Cash-strapped local governments in China, under new laws requiring them to raise their own revenue, encouraged some to liquidate their forests for cash (Dubar and Badenoch 2002). In Indonesia, income generation was the top priority for political reasons, to assert and guarantee greater autonomy from the central government. The way in which illegal timber is legalised by the payment of fees implies a primary interest in income and not in the environment or degradation (Resosudarmo in press). In addition to legal income, there may also be an interest in income from bribes. This paramount interest in income can clearly be detrimental to forest resources, hence the importance of both upward and downward accountability.

A similar problem plagues protected areas. Conservation areas that take lucrative forests out of commercial use may be opposed locally due to the lost revenue opportunities. Unless there are, at least, opportunities for tourist development, local governments may demand compensation (Resosudarmo in press). They may also oppose protected areas that restrict the activities of pre-existing local producers (Pacheco 2003). On the other hand, local governments may defend protected areas against outside interests in favour of locals, but they can also support outside interests if they think there will be economic benefits (Larson 2001b, Pacheco 2003).

It is difficult to be too conclusive given the current configuration of powers. Part of the preoccupation with acquiring income from forests could be biased precisely because many local governments believe they have unfairly been given responsibilities without authority or benefits, or even funding to carry out their new responsibilities. It is possible, however, to identify some of the common conditions in cases where local governments have promoted deforestation. At a national scale, from cases such as Cameroon and Indonesia, these involve serious problems with both upward and downward accountability, a national context of corruption in forest management, periods of national transition and insecurity and the fear that powers or privileges may be taken away. At a sub-national scale, such areas include districts where there are problems with accountability, particularly in agricultural frontier regions, where lucrative forest resources are abundant and institutions are weak. Future studies should analyse the extent to which prosecution of corrupt local leaders affects the quality of future leadership, as well as other options such as the effect of opportunities for re-election, financial incentives, etc.

Problems with low capacity are common among local governments but can be solved.

As mentioned earlier, 'low local capacity' is one of the most common reasons given by central actors for the failure to transfer greater funding or power to local governments (Bazaara 2003, Kassibo 2003, Larson and Ferroukhi 2003). Problems with local capacity do, in fact, affect decision-making in many ways. But the issue deserves much greater reflection. As Bazaara (2003) writes, if capacity were truly the concern, the solution would be capacity building, not re-centralisation.

'Capacity' is a broad concept referring to the abilities of local governments to carry out their mandates. These abilities can include financial and administrative management, problem-solving, technical skills and the capacity to be democratic leaders. Romeo (2003) divides these abilities into internal and interactive capacities. The former refers to the ability to carry out management functions, while the latter refers to their ability to cooperate, coordinate and negotiate conflicts in a network of state, civil society and private sector actors.

Local government capacity is affected by individual factors, relating to current personnel, and institutional structures, rules and procedures. Romeo argues that training programs for local government have wrongly emphasized the individual capacities of current personnel, rather than, for example, establishing institutionalized management systems. In forestry, capacity concerns often refer to technical capacities relating to forest management, and sometimes the management of related funding. Far less attention has been paid to the interactive capacities needed to promote local democracy under decentralization.

While it is clear that technical decisions require certain technical expertise, it is important to remember that many forestry institutes reserve for themselves far more than technical decisions. In addition, the tendency to establish complex bureaucratic procedures for forest exploitation and to require detailed management plans exaggerates the need for certain kinds of knowledge; but forest management does not have to be done this way. Though technical knowledge may be needed to understand how the area logged will be affected by the amount extracted, this is not true for issues such as determining the distance from water sources or tree diameter. And even with regard to the former, local history and experience may have generated local knowledge that could be equally if not more important than the technical expertise of forest professionals who are often based in the capital and have no such experiential knowledge of the particular forest in question.

More research needs to be done to help clarify the precise *kinds* of abilities that local governments would need under different models of decentralized forest management. In Latin America, municipalities active in forest management tend to have the following: personnel dedicated, at least part time, to forest or environmental concerns, who have a basic understanding of the issues; responsible and transparent management of funds; and the ability to communicate, coordinate and negotiate effectively with a variety of people and interest groups (see Ferroukhi 2003). Dupar and Badenoch (2002) argue that local officials should be trained in participatory approaches and sensitivity to gender, ethnic and other kinds of differences.

In some cases, local governments have been effectively trained, or receive sufficient funding to hire trained personnel, to undertake forest management responsibilities (Ferroukhi and Echeverría 2003, Pacheco 2003). Funding can enhance capacity by facilitating the hiring of better-trained personnel and/or of establishing forestry or environment offices with the personnel and resources necessary to travel to rural areas, investigate forestry problems or conflicts, promote local projects, and so on. Urban municipalities with a larger tax base show clear advantages in this respect, as well as a few rural municipalities with significant NGO or donor funding (Larson 2001b).

Where local government forestry or environment offices exist, they have often managed to improve coordination with central agencies and with local actors, to contribute to organising and structuring the municipality's role in environmental concerns, stimulate the entry of financial resources, provide technical assistance locally and become self-sustaining thanks to income from forestry (Larson 2003d, see Ferroukhi 2003). They are not, however, without problems. They are often too dependent on foreign projects, have too little funding and are vulnerable to political changes at the municipal level.

Downward accountability alone is not sufficient to guarantee sustainable forest management.

Though there have been many experiences of local forest management that have improved environmental conditions, local residents may not always want to conserve their forests. Hence the downward accountability of local governments may lead to positions that promote deforestation. In Uganda, for example, as well as in Nicaragua, candidates to local government have promised to open up park land if they are elected (Bazaara 2003). These candidates are not only responding to local demands but also often own land in the park themselves. In another case, officials failed to enforce a ban on mahogany logging because local people wanted the wood to make desks for the local school (Bazaara 2003). Similarly, in some agricultural frontier areas that are dominated by new colonists, the majority of immigrants prefer clearing the forest for agriculture (Larson 2001a, Toni 2003). These realities remind us of the importance of regulation, oversight and upward, as well as downward, accountability. They also, however, suggest opportunities, under democratic decentralisation, for seeking negotiated solutions that could work both for local people and for the forest.

Local government associations can improve the effectiveness of local government.

Local government associations, both at the national and regional levels, can increase the effectiveness of local government. The national municipal association (AMUNIC) in Nicaragua, for example, has served as an effective tool both for promoting legislation in defence of local government interests as well as for demanding responsible behaviour from local leaders. In Indonesia, local government associations are important for improving communication and strengthening bargaining power with other levels of government (Resosudarmo and Dermawan 2002).

Regional associations allow local governments to come together to address broader-scale problems, such as the management of environmental externalities and forests and water sources that span their borders. In China, for example, one municipality simply placed its polluting enterprise downstream from the local water supply, while doing nothing to stop the effects further downstream (Dupar and Badenoch 2002). In Honduras there are almost 100 such associations, called *mancomunidades*. They have joined forces to confront common problems, increase their overall capacity by sharing strengths and improve their negotiating power. In forestry, they are seen as an opportunity to invest jointly in projects such as local transformation of timber and to seek better market opportunities (Larson 2003d, Vallejo and Ferroukhi in press).

Implications of Decentralisation for the Timber Industry

Few of the studies reviewed here directly address implications of decentralisation for the timber industry. In general, industry appears to be able to adapt to the new circumstances, though what exactly that means varies from country to country.

The timber industry is dissatisfied when decentralisation increases insecurity and costs, but at least in some cases may find it easier to work with local officials.

In Indonesia, industry representatives expressed concern regarding the security of the business environment, because the ‘rules of the game’ were no longer clear, though this is not entirely due to forestry decentralisation but rather broader-scale transition and crisis. They were concerned that central government permits would no longer be recognised locally and that they would no longer have legitimacy in concession areas. Whereas they previously needed to establish personal relations with central government officials, they now needed to cultivate relations with the local elite (Resosudarmo and Dermawan 2002).

In Nicaragua, the industry was frustrated by increasing costs. The process was still controlled by the central government, but local officials now also demanded fees. The result was a new forestry law that outlaws these local charges (Law 462). In contrast, in Cameroon, timber companies admitted that they prefer working directly with decentralised structures than with administrative authorities and civil servants from the Forestry Ministry ‘whom they find hard to satisfy and always eager for more money’ (Oyono 2003).

Other Factors Affecting Forestry Decentralisations

Many factors outside of the specific process of forestry decentralisation affect the process and its outcomes. Here we take note, in particular, of the broader macroeconomic goals and policies, as mentioned in the introduction, as well as corruption, land tenure issues and poverty. None of the studies reviewed here focus on analysing these factors in relation to forestry decentralisation, hence far more research is needed to understand their effects more fully.

Macroeconomic development goals may interfere with opportunities for effective decentralised forest management.

In Bolivia, the Guarani people have been unable to formulate their own, more equitable development vision under decentralisation. The broader development pattern is defined by privatisation and increased resource exploitation, and local actors are unable to influence this (Beneria-Surkin 2003). Similarly, in India, development is shaped by the government’s desire to open up lands (tribal areas) to national and multinational investment (Sarin et al. 2003).

In Vietnam and Laos, production quotas and export targets of upwardly accountable line agencies do not necessarily match local priorities for subsistence or tolerance for risk (Dupar and Badenoch 2002). In China, powerful central policymakers undermine decentralised powers by imposing sweeping decisions that affect people’s forest-related livelihoods, such as a logging ban on natural forests (Dachung and Edmunds 2003, Xu and Ribot in press).

Corruption, violence and powerful actors who operate outside, or above, the law are detrimental to effective democratic decentralisation.

When there is serious corruption at the national level, decentralisation may simply allow more local elites to participate in corrupt activities. Similarly, violence of all kinds can interfere with the rule of law; specifically, vertical state violence has shifted to more horizontal, community versus community, violence with decentralisation in Indonesia (Peluso 2002). Other actors who operate outside the law include traditional leaders in Uganda (Bazaara 2003), the ‘timber mafia’ in Nicaragua (Larson 2003b) and drug traffickers, who are suspected of occupying forested areas in Nicaragua (Pommier n.d.) and Honduras (Vallejo 2003). These actors interfere with the overall institutional framework for effective governance.

Land tenure ambiguities or conflicts often need to be resolved before effective local forest management can occur.

Many of the studies mention land tenure problems in their analysis of forest sector decentralisations. In India, some of the legal ambiguities in decentralisation policies are related to tenure ambiguity (Sarin et al. 2003). In Southeast Asia, Dupar and Badenoch (2002) concluded that the resolution of land tenure problems was essential for securing livelihoods, prior to effective decentralised development planning. Municipal reserve creation in Bolivia is limited by tenure conflicts and lack of information on the exact location of public forests (Pacheco 2003). Resolving tenure issues is essential for improving the management of *ejidos* in Guatemala (Thillet et al. 2003).

Poverty limits local peoples' resource management alternatives.

When poverty plays a role in deforestation, protecting the forest cannot simply mean keeping local people out. But there are rarely simple solutions. When limits need to be placed on forest use, there must be alternative sources of income for forest-dependent people (Bazaara 2003).

Outcomes of Current Policies

It is important to recognise that the outcomes summarised here are not necessarily, or even often, the outcomes of forest management under democratic decentralisation. Rather, they are the outcomes of current policies, with all their strengths and weaknesses as discussed above. It is beyond the scope of this paper, then, to try to identify all of the factors that affect these outcomes. Instead the paper provides a brief summary first of environmental outcomes, followed by social outcomes.

Increased local authority over forests can result in greater sustainability, or greater deforestation.

At two extremes, perhaps, are the cases of India and Indonesia. In India, in Kumaon and other areas where local elected *panchayats* manage forests, forests are in very good condition (Agrawal 2002, Sarin et al. 2003). Some are in better condition than those of the forest department (Sarin et al. 2003). In addition to being in good condition, they have provided local livelihoods for 60 years (Agrawal 2002).

At the other extreme, Indonesian forests under greater local control have resulted in a proliferation of logging contracts with little concern for their environmental effects (Resosudarmo in press). Indonesia is going through a period of national crisis and transition, where local leaders are determined to assert their authority as well as obtain benefits from resources that had previously been out of reach. The process is similar in Cameroon (Bigombe 2003, Oyono 2003). In other cases, such as Yunnan, China, where local authorities were given new powers over forest resources in the past, there was also a dramatic increase in deforestation (Dachung and Edmunds 2003). But this increase turned out to be temporary, and the trend reversed. Analysis suggests the increase was due to tenure insecurity and the fear that the rights to manage forests would again be taken away (Dachung and Edmunds 2003). It is possible, then, that the same reversal could happen in Indonesia. On the other hand, Barr et al. (2001) concluded that the pattern is no different than it was under centralised management: there is little interest in or concern about long-term sustainability.

Bazaara (2003) concludes that environmental outcomes of decentralisation depend on whether it is in the interest of dominant groups to protect the environment and the existence of effective checks and balances. With effective democratic decentralisation, the interest of dominant groups should include their political interest in representing and responding to the desires of the people who elected them.

Decentralisation policies have positive social effects when they seek to empower local people and when those receiving powers are accountable to local people.

In Bolivia's decentralisation, local people now have legal and secure access to forest resources that they did not have previously, and the role of local municipal forestry offices has been determinant in this process (Pacheco 2003). Local governments also have greater resources than before, through both government transfers and the re-distribution of forestry funds. Local groups with access to forest resources have greater negotiating capacity with absent landowners and concessionaires (Pacheco 2003). In other countries, too, local groups now have greater legitimacy, status and visibility and are able to attract outside resources (Edmunds et al. 2003). Indigenous and peasant interests are taken into account where these actors participate in local government (Larson 2003b, Pacheco 2003) or where personal or political ideologies are based on support to these sectors (Toni 2003). Incomes are high and forests are well-managed in China where village committees have managed resources accountably and responsibly (Dachung and Edmunds 2003). Creative solutions have provided positive social outcomes in Uganda, such as organising locals to manage resource exploitation and improve their incomes, then taxing them to benefit the municipality as a whole (Bazaara 2003).

Even in Indonesia, where increased local authority has clearly had detrimental effects on forests, local people have income from forests for the first time in 30 years. At the same time, this has mostly been captured by those who had capital (Resosudarmo in press). Still, even local entrepreneurs, unlike outside logging companies in the past, are under social pressure to contribute to local projects (though these benefits are not sustainable at the current rate of extraction, McCarthy 2001b).

Decentralisation policies have negative social effects when they seek to extend state control over local people, when they fail to address equity concerns and/or when those receiving powers are not accountable to local people.

In the cases where state policies undermined pre-existing local institutions, women, ethnic minorities and the very poor have not proportionately benefited from devolution policies. Any small gains are usually overshadowed by the loss of resource access and control, as institutions newly created or sponsored by the state were imposed over existing institutions with little legal standing or clear property rights (Edmunds et al. 2003). In India, in places where the state had previously imposed tight restrictions, subsistence access to forests did in fact increase, but where there were local management institutions previously, state contracts decreased local access (Edmunds et al. 2003).

In India and the Philippines, the forest department made decisions regarding the species with which to reforest and afforest, displacing species valued locally. Plantations were established on common lands that people had used for other purposes for livelihood needs (Edmunds et al. 2003). Local governments did the same thing in China where they were not accountable to villagers (Dachung and Edmunds 2003). Decentralisation that ignores existing management institutions both creates and destroys income opportunities, in general creating them for the elite and destroying them for the poor (Edmunds et al. 2003).

Decentralisation may create a new space for elites, actually strengthening their standing (McCarthy 2001a, Pacheco 2003). In some cases the elite apply the law against those who do not have the political contacts or capital to legalise their activities (McCarthy 2001a). The central government may also form alliances with local elites in order to maintain control (Edmunds et al. 2003). Poor local people are still just low-wage labourers whether concessions are with outside concessionaires or local entrepreneurs (Resosudarmo and Dermawan 2002).

Failure to address equity issues can also lead to new conflicts. Small-scale permits in Indonesia may generate conflicts between smaller scale local illegal loggers and those elite who want the 100 ha permits (Resosudarmo and Dermawan 2002). There has also been an increase in ethnic conflict as certain groups with connections rush to take advantage of new opportunities at the expense of others (Barr et al. 2001).

Special provisions are needed to address these inequities and enable equal access to decision-making (Dupar and Badenoch 2002). Disadvantaged groups need 'explicit recognition of unequal gender and power relations, and firm provisions to ensure that livelihood interests and the rights of the poorest are given priority and protection' (Sarin et al. 2003). Management objectives should be designed with broad-based participation in order to address inequities (Sarin et al. 2003). Some researchers argue that direct devolution to local resource users, rather than through local governments, is more effective at embracing local interests and priorities (Shackleton et al. 2002).

In some cases, decentralisation policies that had negative effects on local people, or on the local poor, had positive effects on forest cover. Most researchers believe that increasing regeneration while decreasing access for poor people who depend on forests for livelihoods is not an acceptable alternative, especially while trees are still being felled for state revenue (Contreras 2003, Edmunds et al. 2003, Sarin et al. 2003).

DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION THAT WORKS

The concluding section of this paper briefly summarises some of the key issues that have arisen from the review of the case studies and makes several suggestions for the future. In addition to the many lessons learned that were discussed in the previous section, there are a few important general findings that should be mentioned or emphasised here.

First, throughout the case studies there is a remarkable lack of information about the legal framework for forestry or for decentralisation. In many cases, not even local governments, let alone the average citizen, understand their rights and responsibilities. This makes it very difficult for local governments to fulfil their duties as well as for citizens to hold them accountable.

Second, the environment and natural resources are sources of tributes of all kinds, to many people at different levels of government (Kassibo 2003). This makes natural resources a highly conflictive arena when it comes to discussions regarding the distribution of powers over resources, as well as a domain that is particularly vulnerable to corruption. Decentralisation protagonists must take this political and economic reality into account if decentralised forest management is to be effective.

Third, checks and balances are needed on all levels of power and authority, whether this means central, state or local government, or other local organisations such as communities. Elites benefit most often whether forest management is centralised or decentralised. Marginalised groups tend to lose out unless they receive special attention and are specifically included.

Finally, the monitoring of logging and management plans and enforcement of forest management regulations appears, in general, to be rare, or highly selective, whether this is the responsibility of central government or local government. Few authorities appear willing or able to invest the resources necessary to effectively monitor logging or prosecute loggers, particularly logging companies, who violate forest rules. When there is enforcement it is sometimes directed against those who are easier to control rather than those who commit the most serious violations.

The case studies also reveal that democratic decentralisation is hard to come by. If democratic decentralisation requires significant discretionary powers in the hands of downwardly accountable local actors, then current processes often fail on both counts. There are several fundamental problems. One is the resistance on the part of central governments to give up powers, or the tendency to give them to local entities it can control. Another is the weakness of current electoral processes, as well as other downward accountability mechanisms, to guarantee the representativeness, transparency and accountability of local governments. A third is the failure to recognise decentralisation as a value-laden process for good governance and resource management in the common interest (Oyono in press)—and particularly in the interest of the poorest and most marginalised sectors—rather than simply a way to cut costs.

Different conceptions of development lie behind forestry decentralisations: for example, is decentralisation about promoting community forestry or other local institutions that sustain local livelihoods, or is it aimed at increasing the local benefits from commercial logging—or both? Current policies generally provide only meek attempts at either. In the end, however, these are not issues that can be solved by researchers, but rather require national dialogues that negotiate each nation's development vision in each national context, *after* empowering marginal populations and institutionalising the mechanisms to ensure their effective participation.

Which decision-making powers should be held at which level of government or civil society? The subsidiarity principle, which states that decisions should be made at the lowest level possible without infringing on rights at other levels, is a useful tool but difficult to use in practice. The benefits of lower level decision-making include increased efficiency, capacity development, responsiveness and incorporation of local preferences, knowledge, resources and creativity; higher level coordination is justified by scale effects, transaction costs of decisions and equity, as well as positive or negative externalities across time and space (de Grassi 2003). But the more important question is who decides and with which criteria. Again these decisions should come out of a process that involves a broad-based and effective national dialogue, with a clear commitment to democratic decentralisation.

One of the most important tenets of democratic decentralisation is precisely the importance of taking into account local social, ecological and cultural dynamics—adjusting national policy to the particularities of each district. Rather than defining a blanket mechanism for forest management, decentralised administration should make it possible to identify local differences that imply variations in implementation strategies, in order to define adaptable policies on a national scale. What is the combination of incentives that coalesce in each local arena toward sustainable or unsustainable forest management? This kind of research can be done before, during or after decentralisation policies are in place, though these policies will also then become part of the equation. Forestry decentralisations should begin by working with institutions that are already there—working *with* local people, and building on what they have already built. Elected (representative and accountable) local governments would appear to be the most likely interlocutor for this 'localisation' process.

Each of the lessons learned discussed above suggests alternatives, in addition to those already discussed, that would be more effective for building a democratic decentralisation that works for local people and forests:

- ? First, the decentralisation experiment needs to be implemented: that is, meaningful discretionary powers over forests should be turned over to representative and accountable local institutions under a clear and unified legal framework.
- ? Electoral processes should allow for independent local candidates, and multiple accountability mechanisms should be promoted and strengthened.
- ? Effective legal recourse mechanisms should be established to promote government accountability at all levels.

- ? Representative and effective institutions should be supported to build greater consensus among stakeholders at all levels, with particular emphasis on promoting the participation of marginalised groups.
- ? Information regarding logging contracts and funding should be managed transparently at all levels, and local governments and local people should benefit from income generated by forest resources.
- ? Central governments should be effective partners in decentralisation, training and accompanying local governments and local peoples in both forest management and the strengthening of local democracy and equity, as well as providing necessary oversight of local officials.
- ? Forestry should be recognised as a multifaceted and integral sphere that is not just economic but also ecological and social, and forestry professionals should be trained in all of these facets.
- ? Third parties such as NGOs should help promote decentralisation by helping raise the voice of local people in defence of their interests.
- ? Elected local governments should be encouraged to build regional associations to address broader-scale issues and problems.

These ‘solutions’, however, do not stand outside of the existing political economy of each nation. If they did, they would probably already have been implemented much more fully. Hence the first step to promoting the effective implementation of democratic decentralisation is recognising the social, economic and political interests of each set of actors. The second is to begin to build a political climate that makes real decentralisation possible. Broad coalitions of local actors, NGOs, donors, local governments and sympathetic central government officials are needed to counteract the centralising tendencies of central governments (Ribot, Larson and Agrawal in press). Local actors must become effective players in their own right—to demand decentralisation and to demand that it be implemented in their interest. Hence specific programs and policies should be aimed at building local knowledge and social capital. This includes civic education, local organisation and communication, horizontal linkages and the ability to interact and negotiate with local government (Dupar and Badenoch 2002), as well as the ability to demand transparency and accountability of local—and central—government. Given the experiences of the case studies reviewed here, it appears likely that without significant pressure from their citizens, central governments may continue to fail to give priority to the ‘democratic’ in decentralisation.

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