

Local Rules and Their Enforcement in the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Reserve Co-Management Arrangement in Kenya

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Abstract

The management of common-pool resources is a key problem in global environmental governance: forests, freshwater resources, pastures, and land are often managed by communities and organisations (bureaucracies, NGOs) at different organisational scales that are competing for the right to manage the resource in question, and often find ambiguous negotiated institutional solutions to co-management problems. Often these solutions are the result of complex bargaining processes rather than of institutional design. In the context of the ongoing debate over the kinds of rules that are appropriate for the sustainable management of common-pool resources (CPRs), this paper examines the local rules and their enforcement emerging from co-management between government agencies and local project communities in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Reserve (ASFR), Kenya's largest remaining coastal forest. Arabuko-Sokoke has been a national forest reserve for many decades, but only during the past two decades have communities been involved in conservation and resource extraction under piloting participatory forest-management schemes. A state-owned and controlled resource is made into a co-managed common-pool resource—or so the theory of community-based natural resource management goes. Our contribution is informed by Ostrom's (1990, 2008) design principles, but we critically scrutinize the manifold problems involved in transfers of access and management rights from state to local community, and the planned (re-)emergence of common-pool resource management. We compare communities involved in a governmental programme fostering communal management and communities not involved in such programmes (The study addresses a number of critical questions related to the transfer of centralised governmental rights in the management of natural resources, and the co-management of forests between government agencies and local communities. The ASFR co-management programme was initiated nearly two decades ago with the aim of conserving the forest and at the same time improving the livelihoods of the communities dependent on it. The findings show that despite a number of challenges, local rules and enforcement have started to emerge in co-managed parts of ASFR, though in an imperfect, volatile and ambiguous manner.

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