

Many natural resource management researchers have focused either on institutional design and evaluation or on livelihood outcomes per se without explicitly acknowledging and rigorously examining linkages between the two. Thus, a major gap in the current literature on co-management institutional arrangements is the extent to which co-management has strengthened the livelihoods of poor forest-dependent communities. This gap is addressed in this paper by developing and testing an argument that well-designed co-management arrangements have strengthened the livelihood outcomes of poor forest-dependent communities in a Kenyan case study. The hybrid analytical framework developed for this analysis situates Ostrom's (1990) design criteria for co-management institutions in the broader context of the Sustainable Livelihood Framework. It then uses this analytical framework to evaluate the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Reserve (ASFR) co-management initiative in Kenya, based on a three-step process. First, the paper provides an overview of current institutional arrangements for governance of the ASFR co-management regime. Second, it evaluates the extent to which these governance arrangements can be characterized as devolved collaborative governance, informed by Ostrom's (1990) design principles and; third, it evaluates the extent to which the livelihood outcomes of forest dependent communities that are participants in the co-management project have had their livelihoods strengthened as a result of the ASFR co-management governance arrangements. The paper demonstrates that the institutional arrangements for ASFR co-management are relatively nascent and emerging because the governance arrangements for the ASFR co-management project cannot be characterized as fully devolved de jure collaborative governance. Notwithstanding this, the findings reveal that participant forest-dependent communities in the co-management project had improved livelihoods compared to forest-dependent communities outside the co-management scheme. It is suggested that this is due to the de facto co-management arrangements.