

Environmental Conflicts Management in Rwanda

The Role of Decentralization

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Abstract

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This thesis concerns the management of environmental conflicts in post-genocide Rwanda through decentralization. The study advances knowledge in the field of peace and development. The thesis contributes an exploration of whether and how decentralization promotes the management of environmental conflicts. The study's central argument is that, on the basis of experiences in Musanze, Kayonza and Rubavu districts of Rwanda since 2000, decentralization can contribute to environmental conflicts management, though the nature and extent of that contribution will be limited if policy is not backed by sufficient resources.

Theoretically, the thesis follows literature on environmental conflicts, environmental conflicts management and peacebuilding. Concepts of devolution, participation, and responsiveness are used as analytical tools. Methodologically, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation and documentary analysis from Musanze, Kayonza and Rubavu districts of Rwanda.

The thesis findings show that the ongoing decentralization in Musanze, Kayonza and Rubavu districts has so far contributed to the management of environmental conflicts. Through creation of local institutions, local leaders and local communities have contributed in the management of conflicts over land, water and forests. However, inadequate resources, personnel, knowledge and skills at the local levels in the three districts have limited the effectiveness of decentralization's contribution with regard to the management of environmental conflicts.

As regards advancements of the research front, this study claims to have contributed to the existing academic debates in peace, conflict and development by filling the gap in the literature; particularly in the ways that environmental peacebuilding is pursued through a decentralized approach. In terms of policy implication, a better understanding of decentralization's contribution to the management of environmental conflicts particularly at the local level is an important step to think about how to empower local authorities with more capacity, and resources in order to effectively address local environmental conflicts.

Key words: environmental conflict management; decentralization; devolution; responsiveness, participation; environmental peacebuilding