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How Effective are Uganda's Environmental Policies?

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Description / Abstract

The livelihoods of most Ugandans intimately depend on the environment, both as a source of subsistence and as a basis for production. Environmental degradation in the country—which includes wetland encroachment and contamination of water resources—is critical: based on estimates, degradation costs represent an environmental debt of about US\$ 1–4 billion today. Although the country's water resources are rich, severe water scarcity is predicted for the near future, particularly in more populated areas and in the more fragile arid and semiarid pastoral areas. The Ugandan government has formulated a number of policies to regulate land use and impacts on the environment. However, the alarming rate at which natural resources are being depleted shows that these laws and policies are not enforced effectively. Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study presented here focused on water resources, assessing their status in 4 mountainous districts of Uganda and evaluating the effectiveness of government policies with regard to restoration and conservation of water catchments. The study revealed a glaring gap between the existence of laws and policies on the one hand, and the reality of implementation on the ground on the other—there is rapid depletion of water resources, and water scarcity has already led to conflicts. The paper calls for effective implementation of existing policies and laws without fear or favor and for increased budgetary allocations from the current 25.6 billion shillings (2006–2007) to 34.45 billion or more, to accommodate funding for the execution of policies and laws. It also calls for meticulous review of the existing environmental policy regime with a view to tailoring, customizing, and localizing it for practical purposes.

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