

ABSTRACT

This study used a political ecology perspective to examine the ways in which participatory natural resource governance affects the livelihoods of communities in Awoja watershed in Eastern Uganda. Specifically, the study assessed the effects of participatory governance on land use practices, assessed whether local people contributed significantly to policy implementation, examined the effects of social, economic and political motivations on actor involvement in the governance of Awoja watershed and established the relationship between participation and livelihood outcomes in the watershed. Quantitative data and descriptive statistics, were analysed using Stata software (version 13.1) while land use changes were analyzed using remote sensing techniques. The study used correlations and simple regression to analyze the relationships and effects among variables respectively. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Altogether 300 respondents from 2 districts implementing participatory environmental governance were interviewed. From the GIS maps, the analysis of land use characteristics showed trends of increasing degradation evidenced by changes in land use/cover types from the period 1986 to 2016. There was an increase in built areas from 0.21% between 1986-1996; to 3.28% between 2006 and 2016 and a notable decrease in forest cover from 107.48 Km² in 1986 to 6.94 Km² by 2016. The results also show a dramatic increase in small scale farming area from 629.44 Km² to 2,376.64 Km² from 1986-2016 while the area of wetland reduced from 2,810.47 Km² to 1,355 Km² over the same period. The analysis of levels of control of land use linked degradation of the natural resources in Awoja to weaknesses in land use control of some land use categories by the various actors. From the correlation results, the findings show that involving local actors in land use governance reduced the levels of control of some land use practices such as fishing, charcoal burning and tree cutting. The relationship between participatory governance and land use practices showed that local people had significant contribution to policy implementation in Awoja. However, institutional bureaucracy, marginalization and conflict of interest as well as social barriers constrained effective participation in watershed management. The analysis also showed that actor participation was influenced by different motivations. From the quantitative analysis, it was found that actor participation in watershed governance had a significant positive correlation with livelihoods outcomes such as diversification, mobility and improvement in the ecological environment. The study found that various livelihood capitals namely physical, social and natural capitals had been enhanced due to involvement of actors in watershed governance. However, it was noted that there was limited political capital enhancement among local communities. The findings suggest that whereas participatory governance of environmental protection policy in Awoja watershed has had positive effects on livelihoods, the participation of actors was contingent on the motivation of different actors. Local compromises based on political, social and economic factors reduced the efficacy of participatory processes in the watershed. The sustainable livelihoods in the watershed is possible if the functionality of local institutions is improved, rules and regulations are adequately implemented and the roles of social institutions are enhanced.