

SDC 2019 Annual Meeting Abstracts

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Title: A Meta-Analysis of Water Resource Governance and Irrigation Sector Decentralization in Africa

Starting in the 20th century, countries across the globe began devolving water resource governance sectors from national-level agencies to local water users, namely farmers. Greater inclusion of farmers in the management of water resources, especially the irrigation sector, aims to improve food security and efficient, equitable use of water. While scholars and practitioners have identified benefits, challenges, and trade-offs to water sector decentralization, the devolution of water governance across Africa is not well understood. The most recent meta-analysis of water governance trends for Africa was presented in 2009 (IFPRI), and assessments of devolved natural resource governance often exclude countries that have not pursued decentralization policies. We present a meta-analysis of water decentralization processes in Africa to characterize what countries are most likely to pursue (or not pursue) water governance devolution, as well as how decentralization policies may affect irrigation land expansion. First, we identified which of the 54 countries in Africa have devolved their water resource sectors. We used the FAO legislation and policy database to code for whether a country had a water rights provision in their constitution and whether water user associations were legally recognized. Then, with secondary socioeconomic and geographic indicators, namely from the World Bank and FAO, we developed a typology of countries that have decentralized their water sector. Finally, we produced an overlay of gridded population data, historical irrigation areas, and agroecological zones to assess trends in irrigation expansion relative to decentralization policies. Preliminary results suggest that approximately half of countries in Africa have devolved their water governance sectors across Africa. Countries that are more developed are more likely to have decentralized policies, whereas autocratic countries and conflict/post-conflict countries are less likely to be decentralized. Finally, decentralized countries only moderately expanded irrigation areas in the immediate years following decentralization policies. Our meta-analysis offers scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers updated information regarding water and irrigation sector decentralization trends across the African continent. Key outcomes suggest that countries that have not decentralized their water sector face a suite of conflict and socioeconomic development challenges; whereas countries with decentralized water policies are already well-embedded in global development agendas.