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HALEY MCCORMICK

Participation of  
NGOs in Land  
Degradation  
Policy-Making  
in Uganda:

*Is Opportunity  
to Participate  
Enough?*



# Participation of NGOs in Land Degradation Policy-Making in Uganda: Is Opportunity to Participate Enough?

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HALEY MCCORMICK

A Major Research Paper

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and for the Water Without Border Post Graduate Certificate

McMaster University

United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH)



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## ABSTRACT

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Global development discourses emphasize the benefits of stakeholder participation in policy-making to sustainably manage the environment and social development. Despite this, little is known about the participation of NGOs in national policy-making in developing countries. The objective of this research is to learn more about how and how much NGOs contribute to policy-making related to land degradation in Uganda. A post-structural theoretical lens informs this research as it recognizes that complex dynamics between stakeholders can determine opportunities to participate, strategies NGOs employ, and the resources and relations that these are based on.

This research assesses the participation of NGOs in Ugandan policy-making related to land degradation through an online semi-structured survey that collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The survey results show that NGOs have an interest in policy-making processes related to issues of land degradation because of its impact on sustainable development. The results suggest that NGOs try and influence the policy process mostly through indirect participation in policy processes, despite opportunities provided by government for direct engagement. Inexperience and limited resources seem to cap the ability of organizations to directly engage in opportunities, and they thus use other strategies to indirectly participate. This paper argues that providing opportunities to participate to policy-making processes is not enough to ensure direct engagement in the policy-making process of NGOs, and discusses ways to potentially remove barriers to direct participation.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

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<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organizations
<b>ELD</b>	Economics of Land Degradation
<b>IFPRI</b>	International Food Policy Research Institute
<b>MAAIF</b>	(Uganda) Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Programme
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCCD</b>	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
<b>UNU-INWEH</b>	United Nations University — Institute for Water, Environment and Health



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# Research Context and Problem

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Uganda is one of the world's poorest and most rapidly proliferating countries. With a population of roughly 31.8 million, 85.2% of Ugandans live in rural communities and approximately 30% live below the poverty line (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2010). 80% of employment in Uganda and most industries depend on the agricultural sector, which is dominated by rural smallholder farmers (NPA, 2007). The agricultural sector was declared by the 2010 Development Strategy and Investment Plan as the most important sector for the development of Uganda, as it contributes to 20% of GDP and 48% of exports (MAAIF, 2010). While fertile land is important for many Ugandan industries such as tourism and mining, it is crucial for the agricultural sector. Organizations like the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) have noted that agriculture, and subsequently development efforts, are substantially impacted by land degradation.

Land degradation is defined by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as the "reduction or loss of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of rainfed cropland, irrigated cropland, or range, pasture, forest and woodlands" (UNCCD, 1994: Article 1(f)). Estimates indicate that approximately 20% of the world's terrestrial surface is experiencing some form of land degradation, affecting roughly 1.5 billion people (UNCCD, 2011; UNCCD, 2012). Land degradation obstructs sustainable development by jeopardizing the usability of land that people, ecosystems, and economies rely on. The Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative considers this economic loss in its comprehensive definition of land degradation as "a reduction in the land capacity to provide ecosystems goods and services over a period of time" (ELD Initiative, 2013a). Land degradation has various natural and human drivers that reduce the economic value of an ecosystem and wellbeing of communities (ELD Initiative, 2013b).

In Uganda, drivers of land degradation include overgrazing by pastoralist herds, deforestation for fuel wood resources, and poor agricultural practices (MAAIF, 2010). Banadda (2010) estimates that 97%<sup>1</sup> of land in Uganda suffers from degradation and impacting approximately 88% of the rural population. One of the greatest obstacles

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1 This percentage is fairly high and should be taken with caution. Land degradation tends to often be subjectively defined by researchers and scientists, rather than objectively. Land degradation is the *persistent* degradation of natural resources and the services derived from them across time. The ELD Initiative's definition of land degradation was developed after the UNCCD's and notes the importance of time in processes of degradation. I would like to thank Dr. Zafar Adeel for pointing this out.

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to sustainable land management in Uganda is the monitoring and enforcement of policies. Evidence from IFPRI suggests that Uganda's land management could be substantially improved through effective policies (Nkonya, Koo, & Marenja, 2011). Currently, policies are weakly enforced and knowledge of sustainable land management is often not available in rural communities. Regardless, the government has attempted to make policies that protect land from unsustainable use. This effort began with the submission of Uganda's National Action Programme (NAP), a framework developed by the government that directs future policies concerning land and sustainable development, to the UNCCD in 1997.

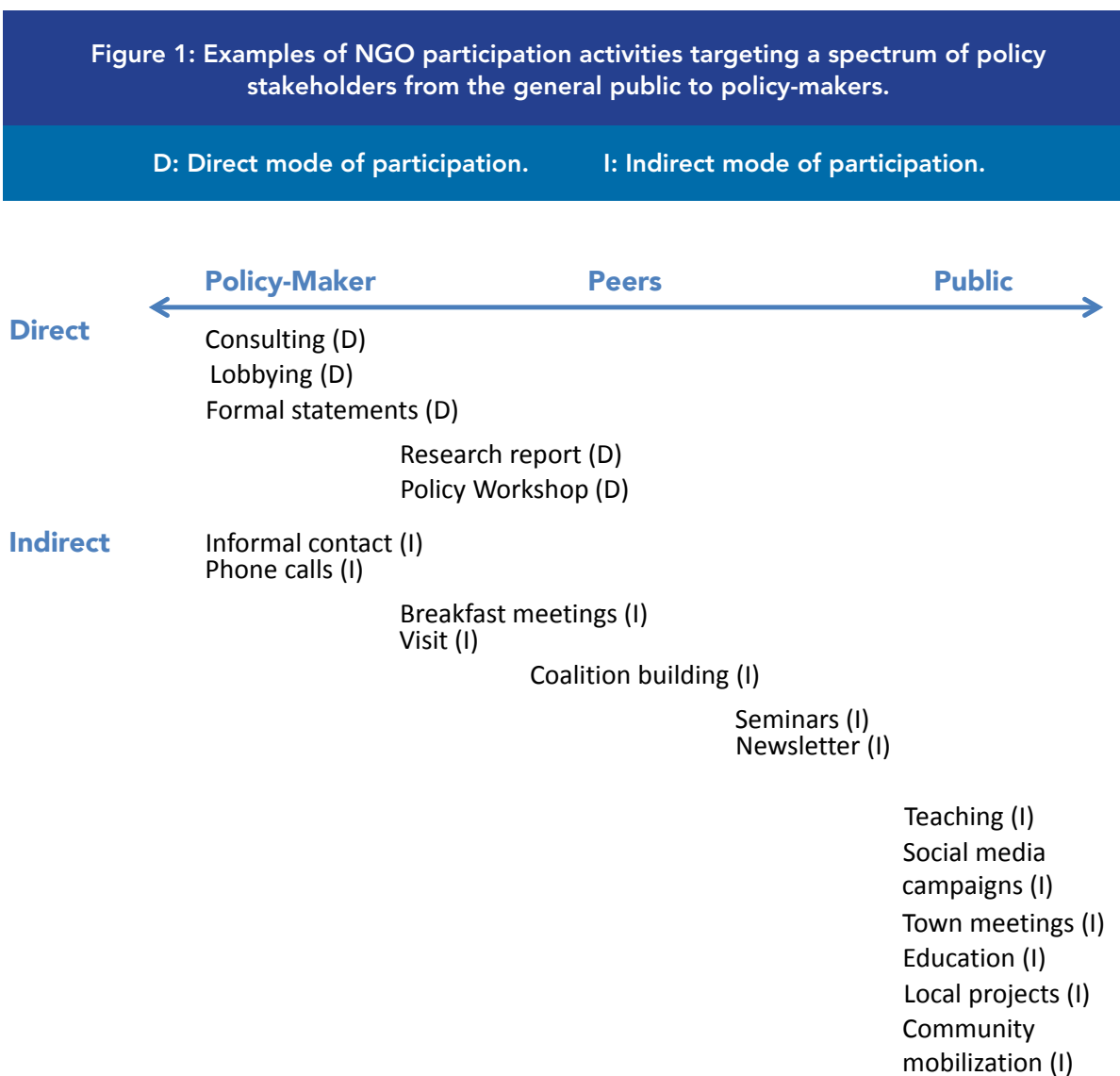
The UNCCD is a legally binding international agreement that aims to combat land degradation through "cooperation among all levels of government, communities, non-governmental organizations and landholders to establish a better understanding of the nature and value of land" (UNCCD, 1994: Article 3 (c)). Through the UNCCD, 195 countries have agreed to work together to restore land productivity and improve conditions for those living in drylands. The UNCCD is composed of many organs, including a Secretariat that facilitates cooperation across parties but has limited influence over the actions taken by Convention members to combat land degradation. It also acts as a platform for exchange between various stakeholders, and the UNCCD text (hereon Convention text), prescribes the participation of all affected stakeholders in policy-making to develop sustainable solutions to land degradation.

The Convention text guides the actions of stakeholders, advocates a bottom-up approach, and embraces the concept of participatory policy-making. Participatory policy-making advocates for the participation of all affected stakeholders in the production and enforcement of policy, with the objective that policies reflect all concerned parties' interests and knowledge. The type of participation prescribed through the Convention text aims to facilitate stakeholder participation in policy-making by removing top-down barriers (see Appendix A). The Convention text also prescribes the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders in national policy-making (UNCCD, 1994: Article 10 (1)). The rationale behind this is to fulfill the bottom-up approach encouraged by the UNCCD by allowing NGOs to represent local communities in policy-making processes. By signing on to the UNCCD, Uganda has committed to providing opportunities for direct participation of all stakeholders affected by land degradation in policy-making, yet there is no enforcement mechanism to ensure this occurs (i.e., no penalties for breaches of the agreement). Nonetheless, multiple policies produced by Uganda since 1997 have included clauses that indicate the government's willingness to involve various stakeholders in policy-making, including NGOs.

The NGO sector in Uganda is fairly small, though it has been growing since the 1980s (NGO Forum, 2011). It is composed mostly of local grassroots organizations, though several foreign NGOs have headquarters in the country (Barr et al., 2004). NGOs sustain a tradition of service provision in rural communities and their participation in policy-making is a fairly novel phenomenon (Nanyonga, 2010). With approximately 86% of NGO funding stemming from foreign sources, the argument has been made that NGOs reflect the interests of donors, not Ugandans (USAID, 2010), while others insist it is one of the few voices that can represent local communities (DENIVA, 2006).

The requirement of NGO participation in land degradation policy-making by the Uganda government parallels a steady increase in stakeholder participation in policy-making across many political issues and levels. These processes are mainly driven by a global participatory policy-making discourse, largely sustained by donors and conventions like the UNCCD, which assumes that NGO participation can incorporate local interests and knowledge in policies and hold governments accountable.

NGO participation in policy-making processes can occur both directly and/or indirectly. **Direct participation** is associated with the provision of opportunities to engage in formal policy-making processes. **Indirect participation** relies on resources and activities targeting policy-makers on an informal basis and other actors actively involved in policy-making processes, as well as building public support to influence policy-makers. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the possible modes of both direct and indirect participation that NGOs can employ to influence various actors in policy-making processes. Despite measures by the government of Uganda to provide opportunities for direct participation, the NGO sector in Uganda seems to rely mainly on indirect participation strategies (Nanyonga, 2010).



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The Convention text and Uganda's NAP are forms of donor-driven, induced participation that aim to create opportunities for participation in policy-making, but **are opportunities for participation enough to ensure participation in policy-making related to land degradation?**

It is the discrepancy between prescribed and actual participation that drove this research. These issues have been studied from many different viewpoints, but rarely from the perspective of NGOs at sub-global levels<sup>2</sup> (Briassoulis, 2011). This research investigates the participation of NGOs in policy-making, using land degradation policy in Uganda as a case study. It assesses whether provision of participation opportunities by the government of Uganda as prescribed by the Convention text is enough to induce NGO participation in policy-making processes related to land degradation.

This research argues that government-initiated participation facilitated by the Convention text has the potential to enable direct participation in policy-making processes for some NGOs working in Uganda, but due to limited organizational capacity, not all NGOs are able to directly engage and thus many employ bottom-up indirect strategies to influence policy-makers. The potential benefit of incorporating local knowledge into policy through the participation of NGOs is therefore hindered by factors that limit such participation.

This research builds on the efforts of the ELD Initiative, a global study on the economic value of land and land-based ecosystems. The ELD Initiative emerged to address identified gaps in land management by the UNCCD, by adding an economic lens to the biophysical study and governance of land degradation<sup>3</sup>. It actively promotes action against land degradation by identifying and removing barriers to action on the ground. This objective relates to the efforts of the UNCCD to remove top-down barriers to sustainable land management by prescribing the participation of NGOs in land degradation policy-making. In fact, the ELD 2013 Interim Report noted that increased participation and dialogue between all stakeholders is an important element for developing an awareness of the potential gains that can be made from improved land management (ELD Initiative, 2013b). Therefore, this research can contribute to the ELD Initiative by identifying possible pathways for promoting NGO participation into decision-making processes, and may be of interest to ELD Initiative partners that work on the ground in promoting effective action towards sustainable land management.

This research paper begins with a review of recent literature on NGO participation in policy-making processes (Chapter 2). This is followed by a description of the methodology employed (Chapter 3), an examination of its findings (Chapter 4), a discussion of their broader significance (Chapter 5), and the identification of research limitations (Chapter 6). Finally, it finishes with research conclusions and implications, as well as future research (Chapter 7).

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2 Much research on participatory policy-making occurs at a global level and there seems to be limited analysis of participation on a national scale and the fluidity of actors between these levels.

3 The ELD Initiative partially came into being as a result of a meeting reviewing the UNCCD at UNU-INWEH in 2009, which called for a different, broader perspective than that of the convention for greater impact and effective change.







# Reviewing Literature on Participatory Policy-Making

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## 2.1 THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING

Ideas about participatory policy-making are informed by a number of sources, including direct democracy and communitarian theories (Chhotray, 2004: 328). Different schools of thought have contributed interpretations of the benefits and drawbacks of participatory policy-making, and of these, classical liberalism, pluralism, and post-structuralism have relevant positions in defining the scope of this paper.

Classical liberal theory depicts public and private sectors (government and private enterprises, respectively) as independent, with government characterized as a neutral entity unable to fully control the actions of private groups (Chhotray, 2004). The concept of government as a neutral agent is problematic for the study of participatory policy-making because it nullifies its power and jurisdiction. The separation of these sectors also ignores the fluidity of personnel, interests, and resources between them, and how these relations can impact NGO participation (Bernal & Grewal, 2014). More recent theoretical approaches analyze these sectors as interdependent.

Pluralism is a theoretical approach that assumes policy-making is the purview of government, but that many other stakeholders use their resources to exert influence on these processes. This approach reflects the context of this research in that its central theme is composed of multiple interests working together to make decisions representative of society's interests (Brown, 1990). However, there are important constraints that reduce its compatibility with this research. Studies from the pluralist camp focus on non-government actors and pay insignificant attention to the activities of governments, donors, and external structures (Smith, 1990: 308). Pluralist perspectives did not direct this research, as they do not incorporate the involvement of external actors and elements like the UNCCD.

Post-structuralism allows for a more dynamic construction of participatory policymaking. It is an approach that emerged in the 1960s and examines the agency of actors within structures of power (Merlingen, 2013). Post-structuralism focuses on stakeholders in policy-making and questions their ability to influence processes in a structure of prescribed participation, such as the UNCCD. This theoretical approach informed this research because it recognizes that the complex dynamics between stakeholders can determine opportunities to participate, strategies NGOs employ, and the resources and relations these are based on (Bebbington, Hickey, & Mitlin,

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2008; Gunter, 2004). A limitation of this approach is that its conclusions are often specific to the context the research unfolds in and are constrained in their generalizations. Nonetheless, the post-structuralist focus on agency and relations allows for a fuller understanding of how NGOs participate in policy-making (Miller, Taylor, & Howard, 2013; Stokke, 1997; Rhodes, 1996, 1997).

## 2.2 PARTICIPATORY POLICY DISCOURSES

Participatory policy-making discourses gained popularity in the 1980s and were complemented by a donor-driven approach to international aid that emphasized people-centered decision-making (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Tadesse, 2010). During this period, the importance of capturing the consent of civil society and increasing government accountability to local communities prompted changes in how policies were made and who was involved in the process. Participatory policy-making is an exceptionally broad, largely donor-driven discourse that is championed by international organizations like the UNCCD and the International Monetary Fund. Though the UNCCD does not provide a definition of participation, the World Bank's conceptualization of this process suffices for demonstrating its general presentation in global discourses: "stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them" (World Bank, 1996: xi). The rhetoric of participation does not always reflect efforts on the ground however, and while many international authorities advocate for it they rarely provide advice on how it should take place in policy-making. The concept of participation has gained popularity in intellectual and development discourses due to its projected outputs of increased government accountability and policy effectiveness, though these benefits often do not appear in reality as theoretically described (Baiocchi, 2003; Oakley & Clegg, 1999; The World Bank, 1996).

Discourses about participation indicate that these processes produce efficient and democratic governance by incorporating local knowledge and concerns in policy-making so that decisions reflect people's needs (Klintenberg, Seely, & Christiansson, 2007). Theoretically, participation benefits are said to: improve relations between government and society; increase government accountability and transparency; produce relevant and efficient policy; and empower civil society (Albin, 1999; Cleaver, 1999; Gemmill & Bamidele-Izu, 2002; Riddell-Dixon, 2004). They are said to benefit all stakeholders involved, as government is held accountable to communities through NGO representation and policies are more efficiently executed. Albin (1999) argues that at the very least, participation can ensure that important issues are brought to the attention of government officials. Perceived benefits of participatory policy-making are more easily assessed when NGOs directly engage in these processes. The rewards of indirect participation are less pronounced and examined in the literature. Regardless, many scholars and practitioners advocate for participatory policy-making due to its positive normative and empirical benefits.

Others question whether participatory policy-making yields benefits for communities, NGOs, and government, and critique its potential benefits. For instance, a critique of participatory policy-making made by Bebbington, Hickey, and Milton (2008) is that it is a political mechanism employed by governments that reduces the accountability and representation of democratic processes by including unelected actors. Another argument against participatory discourses is that there are often significant asymmetrical power relations between actors in policy-making that can determine the final policy and exist despite attempts by government to provide opportunities for equal stakeholder participation. These positions suggest that the prescription of participation by government or international bodies may not always result in the benefits theoretically described (Dur & De Bievre, 2007). Critics

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of participatory processes argue that policy outcomes can differ greatly and can even disadvantage marginalized groups (Cleaver, 1999: 599). If civil society representatives do not have the capacity to engage in participatory processes, it is likely that outcomes will be reflective of those who can (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Sanderson and Kindon (2004) argue that without efforts to facilitate the negotiation of power and knowledge in participatory processes, rewards will never be reaped. These potential outcomes are symptomatic of the context that participation occurs in.

The government of Uganda has made efforts to involve NGOs in policy-making processes since it ratified the UNCCD and its participatory policy-making discourse in 1997. The Convention text emphasizes that all stakeholders, including NGOs, should be involved as governance partners through government-initiated participatory policy-making. While the Convention text establishes a participatory discourse in many of its articles it provides no definitive instruction on how this might occur (Bruyninckx, 2004). Additionally, despite the legally binding element of the UNCCD, there are no enforcement mechanisms and therefore little incentive for governments to maintain their commitment. The prescribed participation emanating from the Convention text only acts as a guide for governments and cannot ensure that policy-making takes place in a manner that allows for equitable participation of all stakeholders. Nonetheless, the government of Uganda has utilized the discourse of participation in some policies produced since the late 1990s, recognizing NGOs as both service providers and partners in policy-making.

### 2.3 THE ROLE OF NGOs IN POLICY-MAKING

NGOs are a heterogeneous group that represents many diverse interests. An NGO is defined in this research as a voluntary organization that is not related to government, does not function for profit, pursues interests for the common good, and acts as a public expert (Anderson, Clement, & Crowder, N.d.; Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Edwards, 2005; Jordan, Wurzel, & Zito, 2005). This definition may not suit every organization but generally describes the NGOs invited to participate in this research. Authors like Appe (2010) have demonstrated the importance of recognizing the varying capacities of organizations within the sector, as portraying it uniformly overlooks the power imbalances inherent in it.

NGOs provide a variety of services to communities and governments. Most researchers and donors focus on the services provided to local communities and few have investigated the role played in policy-making (Appe, 2010; Lister & Nyamugasira, 2003). However, Lister and Nyamugasira (2003) demonstrated that organizations are increasingly fulfilling both service and policy agendas. Applying their argument allows this research paper to move beyond a static categorization of NGO operations, towards a better understanding of how organizations are increasingly participating in policy-making as well as working with communities to establish change in land management. It strengthens the argument that NGOs are able to express the interests of local communities as representatives of civil society in policy-making.

NGOs have not only expanded their operations over recent decades but have also grown in quantity globally and locally. While quantitative growth in NGOs is important for understanding their changing roles, what is arguably more significant is their increasing presence in policy-making. The proliferation of NGOs has contributed to their increased participation in policy-making (Humphreys, 2004), and this growth has been coined the 'NGO boom' in the literature. Authors like Dagnino (2008) and Pinnock (2002) have suggested that these actors cannot be

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seen as belonging to either the first (public) or second (private) sector, but have come to represent a theoretical 'third sector'.

The third sector is a conceptual representation of the position NGOs occupy between public and private sectors, characterized as being 'not the government' (Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Bouget & Prouteau, 2002). This third sector theory has moved conversations about NGOs beyond analyzing their growth and operations, to consider how they connect civil society and local communities to government officials (Pinnock, 2002; Tucker, 2014). Brinkerhoff (1999) suggests that this concept demonstrates that neither government nor market alone is capable of solving the many problems confronting the world. The global discourse on participatory policy-making now recognizes NGOs as experts on local conditions that aim to represent and empower civil society while also working with government to strengthen democratic processes by holding officials accountable.

Despite the commonly cited altruistic interpretations of NGOs as expert representatives of civil society there are concerns about their involvement in policy-making, and there is a division within the literature over NGO interests and motives. This debate is often reduced to discussing whether NGOs are vehicles of social justice or pawns of other actors in a greater neoliberal paradigm (Bebbington, Hickey, & Mitlin, 2008; Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Dagnino, 2008; Humphreys, 2004). Many scholars have argued that NGOs are not always as distinct in practice from government and the economic market as theory suggests (Ape, 2010; Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Krut, 1997; Pupilampu & Tetey, 2000). Particularly in a developing context, there are concerns that NGOs are more representative of donor and government interests than of rural constituents who cannot hold them to account (Brinkerhoff & Kulibaba, 1996; Tucker, 2014). Some argue they actually favour foreign interests and usurp democratic processes (Gemmill, 2002). These contentions also drove this research, as it investigates the participation of NGOs in land degradation policy-making.

## 2.4 THE PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE OF NGOs IN POLICY-MAKING

NGOs are theoretically able to influence policy, defined as a plan of action for government programmes and services, at any stage of its formation. These stages include problem identification, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy monitoring and evaluation (Nanyonga, 2010: p.7-8; Campbell & Coffman, 2009: p. 125). The literature has identified different direct and indirect participatory strategies employed by NGOs in varying environments to influence policy-making processes, including: coalition building; lobbying; raising public awareness; and mobilizing the public (Doh & Guay, 2006; Albin, 1999; Gulbrandsen & Andresen, 2004; Edwards, 2005; Lang, 2013; Nelson, 2000; Lister & Nyamugasira, 2003; Rugendyke, 2007).

The central objective of NGO participation in policy-making is the exertion of influence over legislation that can result in the goals of an organization being achieved. Cox and Jacobsen (1973) provide a definition of influence as "the modification of one actor's behaviour by that of another". Some authors argue that NGOs have largely failed to influence policy-making for a variety of reasons, including poor coordination with allies, lack of resources and mobilization, and advocating unpopular positions (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007; Pollard & Court, 2008). While these factors can affect an organization's ability to influence political actors, they can be overcome through adjustments to strategy and environment. This research therefore focuses on how and how much NGOs participate in policy-making, as well as what determines this, instead of trying to quantitatively measure the amount of influence NGOs can exert.

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Despite the minimal discussion in global discourses of how stakeholder participation in policy-making can occur, and as previously mentioned, there are two distinct forms of participation detailed in the literature. Direct participation occurs when NGOs engage in formal policy-making processes, and is often initiated by government. Government-initiated participation theoretically allows for direct routes of influence. Indirect participation occurs outside of formal processes and targets both policy-makers and other actors who can influence processes. This includes building public support to pressure policy-makers and casually interacting with policy-makers outside of policy-making process. A defining distinction between these types of participation is who the strategies aim to influence; Gulbrandsen and Andersen (2004) argue that this is an important component of participation. Indirect strategies do not focus solely on policy-makers, but instead aim to influence any audience that can influence the work of policy-makers, either inside or outside the policy-making process (Nanyonga, 2010). Indirect participation has yet to be a major area of investigation in the literature, presumably due to its methodological challenges. It is often considered a bottom-up strategy, as it attempts to create social or political change without government assistance. Theoretically, it is not needed if the government initiates direct participation through opportunities (Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

Participatory policy-making may originate at high political levels, but is conditioned by the socio-political, historical, and cultural contexts they are employed in (Bruyninckx, 2004; Oakley and Clegg, 1999). Strategies used by NGOs are based on opportunities to participate as well as internal and external factors. Gulbrandsen and Andresen (2004) argue there is a strong connection between NGO resources and their ability to influence policy-making, whereas Doh and Guay (2006) identify the institutional and national context they participate in as an important factor in their ability to influence proceedings. These two factors can determine the extent to which NGOs are able to contribute information to policy-making through participation, and therefore whether the objectives of this process are achieved.

The use of public support as a tool for influencing policy-makers has been under-discussed in the literature, perhaps because NGOs are generally typified by donors as either service- or policy-oriented (Lister & Nyamugasira, 2003). In the context of Uganda, NGOs concerned with land degradation work closely with civil society groups, particularly farmers and community-based organizations (CBOs) (Muhangi, 2004). There is general support among civil society for the NGO sector but there is also disagreement with the notion that they represent all Ugandan interests (Barr et al., 2004). In relation to issues of land degradation, NGOs claim to represent the interests of the predominately rural farming and pastoralist communities they work with, and are concerned with bringing their demands to the attention of government.

The relationship that NGOs have with the government is also crucial to their participation, as government officials can extend opportunities to participate directly in policy-making (Tucker, 2014). The literature indicates that there is a casual relationship between many NGOs and Uganda government officials. Most NGO officers in Uganda are fairly well educated and there appears to be a fluid interchange of personnel between the two sectors, which can cast doubt on their claimed representation of civil society interests (Barr et al., 2004). The relations NGOs have can influence their ability and opportunities to participate. NGO coalitions and umbrella organizations can however provide access to political arenas. These exist because of the sectors limitations, and provide an opportunity for smaller NGOs to engage in political participation. Barr et al. (2004) noted that 72% of NGOs in Uganda belonged to either a national or regional umbrella organization.

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The resources an NGO has can also determine its ability to participate<sup>4</sup>. International donors fund the majority of the NGO sector in Uganda, with grant income representing more than 86% of revenue (Pinkney, 2009). According to a survey of NGOs in Uganda, the bulk of donor grants are received by a few well-connected NGOs (Barr et al., 2004). Human resources also determine an NGO's ability to participate. Those with a consistent source of income have more opportunities to learn about land degradation, network, and participate in policy-making. These factors can help determine an NGO's ability to participate in formal policy-making and directly influence the process.

Participatory processes are neither wholly good nor bad for a society, and are mostly dependent on the context they unfold in as well as the capabilities of NGOs. This research uses data collected from NGOs in Uganda to answer the following questions about participation:

- » **Why do NGOs participate in policy-making on land degradation in Uganda (or not)?**
- » **How do NGOs participate, directly or indirectly, in policy-making related to land degradation in Uganda?**
- » **Do NGOs perceive their participation to be influential in policy-making?**

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4 During a seminar on this major research paper, Dr. Zafar Adeel suggested that the funding NGOs receive from foreign donors could have been quantified in this project to determine how they use it and whether this allows for external influence over internal processes. Future research should consider using quantitative data collection and analytical methods to learn more about this important factor influencing NGO participation.







# Research Design and Methodology

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This research used both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to explore NGO experiences in Uganda policy-making. Qualitative methods were selected because they provide an opportunity to comprehensively assess the type and impact of participation, whereas quantitative data allowed this research to determine how much respondents are able to participate by learning about their resources and years of experience (Buston et al., 1998; Weber & Christophersen, 2002). The combined use of qualitative and quantitative methods is supported in the field of participatory policy-making (Mansuri & Rao, 2013), and both methods were employed here because they complement each other in determining how and how much NGO participation occurs in Uganda policy-making.

Due to the limited size and scope of this research only two data collection methods were employed. A review of academic and NGO grey literature discussing participatory policy-making and the influence of NGOs in developing countries was conducted to identify which NGOs participate in policy-making and what elements of the Convention text facilitate this action. A semi-structured online survey was also deployed to NGO representatives in Uganda to gather information about their participation in policy-making. This survey was reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board on April 28, 2014, and the associated protocol number is 2014 048.

The survey was developed by the author and based on frameworks of participation used in NGO literature, particularly the work of Betsill and Corell (2001; 2008). An online survey was chosen as a data collection method because it allowed for a wide variety of NGOs to provide qualitative and quantitative information about their participation in land degradation policy-making. The survey was designed to primarily assess participation and how it occurs in Uganda through reflexive accounts given by NGO representatives (Arts and Verschuren, 1999; Betsill & Corell, 2008).

The survey was deployed to 250 NGO representatives in Uganda through the online survey service Fluid Surveys<sup>®</sup>. This research used a strategy of maximum variation to sample a large number of NGOs. Maximum variation sampling aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principle outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant experience (as defined by Patton, 1990). This sampling strategy produces two kinds of findings: (1) high-quality descriptions of individual experiences, and (2) important patterns that cut across single experiences

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and derive their significance from having emerged from a heterogeneous sample (Patton, 1990). To achieve maximum variation, foreign and local NGOs were only invited to participate if they met the following qualifications: (1) they publically stated they were interested in land degradation or related issues (e.g., land tenure and management); and (2) had experience participating in policy-making<sup>5</sup>. Participants were selected based on these qualifications<sup>6</sup> from every region in Uganda were contacted. Published NGO profiles posted on the national Ugandan NGO Board directory, GEF-CSO directory, and various umbrella organization directories between February and March 2014 were used to verify that invited participants met these qualifications.

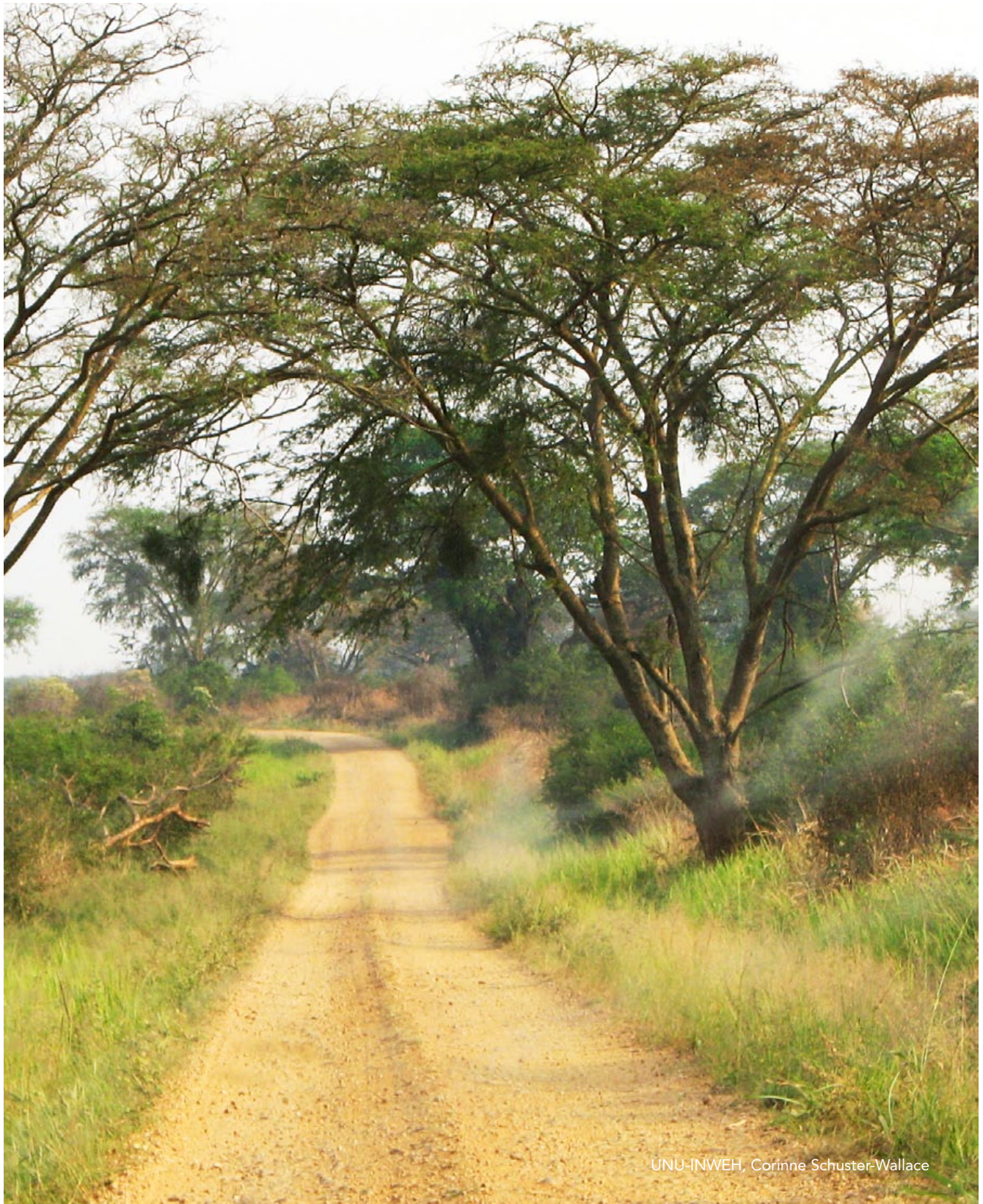
There is a chance that respondent self-selection occurred in this survey. Self-selection is a recruitment problem that arises when respondents decide if they want to participate in a survey or not. This is problematic because if the sample selects itself, it is more prone to a bias that undermines its representation of the whole population. Thus, NGOs more inclined to participate indirectly in policy-making were also more likely to respond to this survey, perhaps due to the conceptualization of participation in this project as a way to indirectly influence policy-making. This could mean that the survey sample was not representative of the whole NGO population. However, there was no external source that would have allowed for a critical assessment of whether self-selection was occurring or not.

The survey consisted of 20 closed and open-ended questions, and the identity of each participant was kept anonymous. Tallied answers and thematic coding of written responses were repeatedly summarized as a form of recursive abstraction analysis. Recursive abstraction is a qualitative research method that enables a comprehensive understanding of why and how events occur through the continuous summarization of data, resulting in an analytical interpretation of events. It is valuable when working with small or large amounts of qualitative data. Here, the analyzed data was compared to previous studies of NGOs in Uganda and literature on NGO participation in governance structures to produce an assessment of the types and impacts of participation. A summary of these results was compiled in a report that was made available to survey participants who had requested it.

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5 The amount of time each organization spends on working in the field of land degradation (for instance, working with communities, participating in policy-making directly, or through other activities) could not be assessed in this survey. This information was not available when selecting organizations to participate in the survey and was not collected through survey questions. Future efforts in this field may use this as a qualification to participate.

6 During a seminar on this project, Dr. Zafar Adeel suggested that the accreditation of NGOs with the UNCCD could have been part of the recruiting qualifications for the survey, or at least included as a question in the survey. This would have been beneficial to see how influential the UNCCD has been amongst NGOs. This was not employed in the survey because the author did not want to reduce the sample size any further by adding qualifications. Regardless, a generous thank you is extended to Dr. Adeel for this important insight and this suggestion may be adopted in future research.

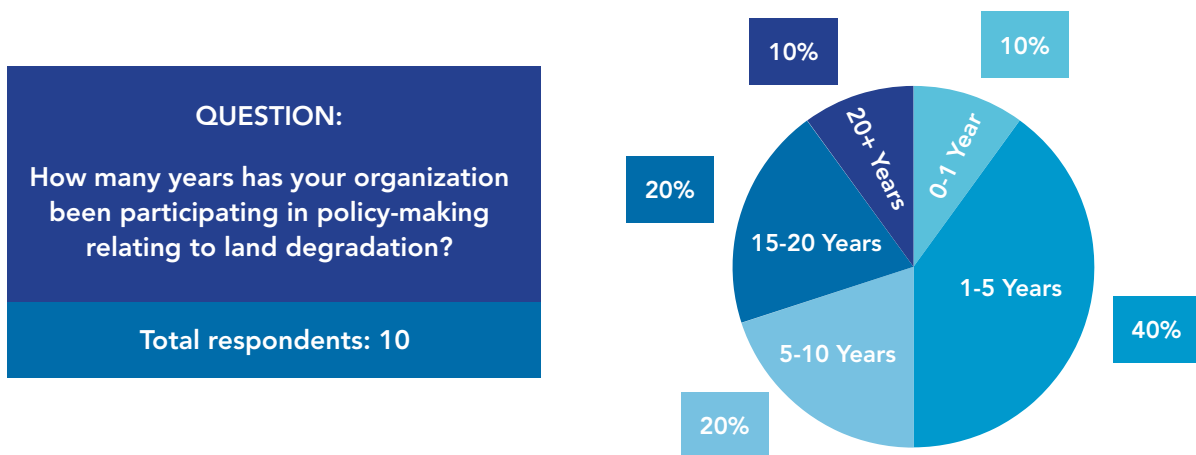




## Results: NGO Survey Findings

This section reports findings from the online survey deployed to assess NGO participation in land degradation policy-making in Uganda. Of 250 invitations that were emailed to NGOs, 77 were not successfully delivered. This report is based on the data provided by the 10 NGO representatives that responded to the survey invitation. Results are organized around the questions guiding this research.

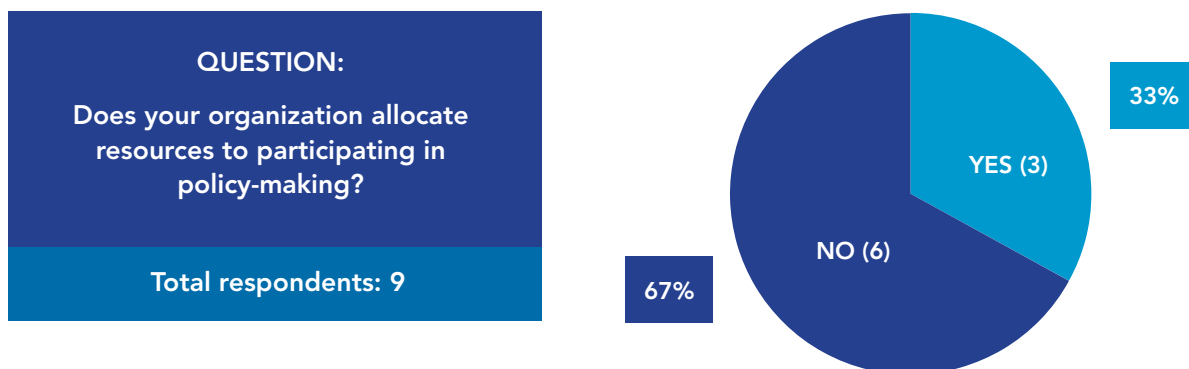
### 4.1 EXPERIENCE WITH AND RESOURCES ALLOCATED BY NGOs FOR PARTICIPATION IN POLICY-MAKING RELATED TO LAND DEGRADATION IN UGANDA



40% of respondents indicated that they have worked with government officials to contribute to policy-making for only 1-5 year(s), which suggests that NGOs do not have much experience participating in policy-making related to land degradation. 70% of respondents stated their organizations have 1-5 staff member(s) that participate in policy-making around this issue. This indicates that the topic of land degradation is only engaged in by a small

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number of staff members and therefore limited human resources are allocated to it. There is a correlation between low levels of engagement with government and an organization's length of experience with land degradation policy-making processes.



66% of respondents reported they allocate no financial resources to engaging government officials in land degradation policy-making processes. This suggests that if respondents are allocating resources to influence policy-making they are doing so through other strategies. One organization clarified that they had:

*"...a budget line dedicated for advocacy<sup>7</sup> on a wide range of policy issues and media engagements to amplify efforts with policy makers as well as collaboration with other organizations."*

This suggests that many NGOs are not allocating financial resources to engaging in policy-making processes for the issue of land degradation alone.

To summarize, survey results indicate that NGOs that do engage governments about land degradation policies have allocated limited human and financial resources for such strategies, and most have few years of experience with policy-making processes and working with government officials.

## 4.2 NGOs REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN POLICY-MAKING RELATED TO LAND DEGRADATION IN UGANDA

Results indicate that there are a number of reasons that motivate NGOs to participate in policy-making related to land degradation. A general finding of this research is that NGOs are concerned about land degradation, though this issue is manifested in broader concerns, and they seek to address it through influencing policy. One participant validated this finding through the following statement relating to lobbying:

*"...advocacy has not been specific on land degradation as a stand alone but overall on agricultural structural reforms, financing, land use management, extension service delivery and accountability of duty bearers."*

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<sup>7</sup> In the online survey, policy advocacy is used to refer to participation into policy-making processes.

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Respondents reported being concerned with land degradation for a multitude of reasons and the lens through which they approach government officials to act on this issue varied. Each organization provided a stance that they take regarding land degradation, and the stances are categorized into themes, discussed below.

Most organizations approach the issue through a sustainability lens, indicating that they think there is work to be done in Uganda regarding the long-term usability of land. This was linked to income from agriculture, community wellbeing, and a general emphasis on the importance of land for long-term development. Many respondents also cited a concern for the future in their responses. Respondents discussed how the work they did in particular communities would enable farmers and others who rely on the land to use it sustainably and help to protect future generations. One organization stated it aims to:

*“...empower community members with knowledge and skills so that they can sustainably handle issues of land degradation.”*

Seven respondents noted the wellbeing of rural communities and future generations as motivations for participating in land degradation policy-making. Another related stance was the empowerment of local communities. Three NGOs used this theme to frame the issue of land degradation through equity and social justice claims. For instance, two respondents stated they participate to secure the equal treatment of citizens, particularly women.

One respondent indicated their organization participated in policy-making because they are concerned with policy (in)effectiveness. Three organizations choose to explain their particular goals for policy participation and training by commenting on the weakness of government policy and devotion to the issue. For instance, one organization wrote:

*“Government policy on land degradation is not strong enough. There is no deliberate effort taken by government to ease pressure on wood biomass resource — a key component of environmental stability.”*

Other respondents in the survey noted that government policies did exist, but that their implementation was too weak to create sustainable change.

In summary, respondents indicated they approach the problem of land degradation through broader policy concerns, such as sustainable agricultural productivity, social justice issues, and policy (in)effectiveness. The perception that current policies about land degradation are weak was held by several respondents and ultimately informs the strategies NGOs use to participate in policy-making.

#### **4.3 TYPES OF NGO PARTICIPATION IN POLICY-MAKING RELATED TO LAND DEGRADATION IN UGANDA**

Respondents indicated in their survey responses that they participate directly and indirectly in policy-making using a variety of strategies. When asked about strategies used to influence policy-making, respondents cumulatively listed 10 examples of direct participation and 14 indirect examples. Common direct strategies included lobbying, submitting formal statements to government, and submitting information to policy negotiations. Indirect strategies

that frequently appeared in respondent’s answers included hosting seminars, writing newsletters, engaging the public through television and radio talk shows, and the use of social media.

All respondents indicated that they work with government officials and CBOs to contribute to land degradation policy-making, which relates to both direct and indirect participation. 90% of respondents indicated that they work with other NGOs in this process. Other partnerships were less prominent.

Formal interactions with government officials, a form of direct participation, were reported at 44%. The frequency of both formal and informal meetings with government officials varied across respondents and each noted different approaches they took to advocate their stance. Most respondents reported they met with officials to discuss a specific issue within the realm of environmental sustainability or agriculture.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPATION IN POLICY NEGOTIATION	
HOW NGOS HAVE PARTICIPATED IN POLICY NEGOTIATIONS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
NGO contributed verbal technical information (D, I)	5
NGO introduced information that changed discussion (D)	5
NGO representative spoke informally with government (I)	5
NGO contributed verbal stance on land degradation (D, I)	4
NGO contributed written document (D)	2
NGO contributed information that was included in the final policy document (D, I)	2
NGO defined a term or issue (D, I)	1

D: Direct mode of participation. I: Indirect mode of participation.

Total respondents: 9

Four respondents noted that they casually interact with government actors during community meetings and conferences, while only three respondents have discussed such matters with government officials during policy negotiations. This indicates that respondents have been presented with opportunities to participate directly in policy-making, but also engage government officials to indirectly influence policy-making in informal settings, like community meetings.

Respondents reported minimal involvement in the negotiations of policies and laws passed at the level of central government. Of 10 participants, only four provided an account of how many policy negotiations their organization has attended, the mean average of which was seven. There was generally a higher attendance at local policy negotiations than those of the central government. Both settings indicate direct participation in policy-making processes.



However, interactions do not merely unfold in the formal settings of policy negotiations and government offices: 66% of respondents said that they had informally or casually interacted with government officials regarding land degradation policy. One representative noted that social media is a way in which his/her organization casually interacts with government officials, and another indicated that information is shared through casual interactions at meetings and dissemination workshops. One respondent discussed calling government officials on the phone and visiting district offices to voice his/her concerns. These are all examples of indirect participation.

Of the different actions taken to contribute to policy-making, the most frequent was a verbal stance on land degradation. More responses were tallied for the contribution of verbal information to government officials than any other action. The most frequent way this action occurred was through seminars and discussion groups about an organization, with 62% of eight respondents indicating this indirect participation had occurred. Only one participant indicated that his/her organization had vocalized a statement directly during a policy negotiation, a form of direct engagement. NGOs were more likely to vocalize information and statements during information sessions, therefore participating indirectly.

TABLE 2: ACTORS NGOs WORK WITH TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FORMATION OF POLICY-MAKING.	
WHICH ACTORS DO YOU WORK WITH TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FORMATION OF POLICY-MAKING?	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Government offices (D)	10
Community-based organizations (I)	10
NGOs (I)	9
Researchers (I)	6
Schools, colleges, universities (I)	6
News agencies (I)	3

D: Direct mode of participation. I: Indirect mode of participation.

Total respondents: 10

Working with other actors to influence policy was a common participatory strategy reported by respondents. Of the activities engaged in by respondents, coordinating with other NGOs to participate in policy-making was the most common, with 70% of respondents indicating they engaged in this form of indirect participation. Three respondents indicated that they had formed a partnership with another policy actor during policy negotiations. The partners listed were mostly NGOs or CBOs, but at varying levels. Examples include the Uganda Land Alliance (national), Participatory Land Use Management (regional), and grassroots CBOs. All respondents identified umbrella organizations and NGO coalitions as important for their engagement in policy-making.

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Half of the organizations surveyed reported they had provided knowledge about local conditions to policy-makers. One respondent noted that his/her organization was currently working with local government to “develop a policy on land degradation” while another mentioned that NGOs

*“...forward (...) concerns to government as fourth arms of government in developing countries like Uganda.”*

In summary, respondents provided multiple examples of using strategies for both direct and indirect participation. There is no way to conclusively state which is used more frequently, though written responses suggest indirect participation more common. There is evidence of interaction with various actors to influence policy-making, though there are doubts among NGO representatives about the influence their participation yields.

#### **4.4 INFLUENCE NGOs PERCEIVE TO HAVE OVER POLICY-MAKING RELATED TO LAND DEGRADATION IN UGANDA**

Overall, respondents were divided on how influential they have been in policy-making processes. Seven respondents noted that the policies produced by the government to combat land degradation and promote sustainable land management are similar to their organization’s stance on the issue. Respondents noted some limitations of their ability to influence policy-making, however, as illustrated by this response:

*“...we can only provide information and what comes out as policy is influenced by many factors.”*

Respondents shared mixed understandings of their role and the extent of their influence in land degradation policy-making. However, they noted that they were unsure of the influence their work has on policy:

*“We have never received back since we wrote to them, so we can’t tell whether our appeals were considered and incorporated or not.”*

Few respondents thought that their work had directly influenced policy-making and indicated that other issues obstructed sustainable land use in Uganda.

Half of the respondents believed that the information they contributed during policy negotiations was incorporated into the final document. Respondents mostly agree that information they provided to policy-makers has created some change in government policy. Correlations between interactions with government and policy impact were made:

*“...interacted with officials from PMA secretariat and saw how organic farming deals with land degradation which informed policy.”*

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In summary, the results of this survey suggest that respondents have been able to directly participate in policy-making processes but also attempt to indirectly influence the policy-making. Specifically, these results show that NGO representatives:

- » Are aware of barriers to influencing government policy on land degradation yet believe that this is an important arena through which land degradation can be combatted;
- » Generally allocate few resources to directly participating in policy-making, and have little experience with land degradation specifically;
- » Have informal relationships with government that are important for participation in policy-making and also have some opportunities to directly participate in policy-making;
- » Rely greatly on forming partnerships with other actors, particularly other NGOs, and communicating their stances verbally (forms of indirect participation); and,
- » Perceive their influence over policy-making processes related to land degradation differently.

The general finding of this survey is that NGOs have directly participated in policy-making, yet still choose to indirectly participate through activities like informal meetings, phone calls, information seminars, and networking with other actors.





# Discussion: The Significance of NGO Participation

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The implications of the survey findings are discussed below to provide an answer to each of the questions guiding this research.

## **5.1 NGOs PARTICIPATE IN POLICY-MAKING RELATED TO LAND DEGRADATION IN UGANDA TO TRY AND GENERATE SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES, DESPITE LIMITED EXPERIENCE AND DEDICATED RESOURCES**

In Uganda, many NGOs have reportedly expanded their operations beyond service provision to participate in policy-making processes (Lister & Nyamugasira, 2003). One likely explanation for this expansion into policy-making is the belief among organizations that policy-making is an effective route to achieve their objectives regarding sustainable land management. All survey respondents expressed interest in working with government officials as a strategy to achieve their goals, both in formal policy-making processes and outside them which suggests they believe this is an arena where they can contribute to sustainable change in land management. There are many reasons cited by survey respondents that facilitate their participation in policy-making.

Respondents reported engaging in policy-making because they believe it is an important way to create change for the communities they work in. It can be assumed that NGOs working closely with rural communities outside of Kampala have different experiences and insights than those based in the capital, but also less ability to directly participate in policy-making. Survey respondents reported that representing local communities was a motivating factor for their participation in policy-making, supporting the argument that NGOs aim to represent civil society interests and can input local knowledge into legislation (Sanderson & Kindon, 2004). Many scholars and global bodies like the UNCCD argue that NGOs are important representatives of local communities in policy-making and can bring civil society concerns to the attention of government officials (Anderson, Clement, & Crowder, N.d.; Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Edwards, 2005; Jordan, Wurzel, & Zito, 2005). There are disputes to these claims, however, with some scholars arguing that NGOs actually participate on behalf of donors or to forward their own interests in policy-making and not for the communities they work with (Lang, 2013). It is not possible to determine in this research whether the interests of local communities are accurately delivered to government

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officials through NGOs<sup>8</sup>. This research has shown that many NGOs claim to work with both local communities and government officials, which can support the argument that NGOs are increasingly fulfilling both provider and advocate functions and perceive policy-making as an important avenue through which to achieve change.

NGOs may be motivated to participate in policy-making but they are not always able to engage either directly or indirectly in these processes. Financial and human resources are deemed by many researchers as limiting conditions on the participation of NGOs in policy-making and can determine who engages and how they do so (Gulbrandsen & Andresen, 2004). This survey has shown that respondents allocate limited financial and human resources to participating in policy-making, which supports the argument that limited organizational capacity can restrain the direct participation of organizations in policy-making. This may explain the reported reliance on forms of indirect participation among survey respondents (e.g., networking and the use of social media to build public support). Thus, there are ramifications for how participatory policy-making is facilitated by governments. Extended opportunities that do not recognize and account for limited organizational capacity can restrict direct participation to those who can allocate financial and human resources to these activities. The limited resources that characterize survey respondents reflects previous studies in NGO participation in policy-making, and shows that there is a need to pay closer attention to the ability of actors to participate when national governments execute these discourses.

## **5.2 NGOs PARTICIPATE BOTH DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY IN POLICY-MAKING RELATED TO LAND DEGRADATION IN UGANDA**

The influence of the Convention text in Uganda has resulted in more opportunities for NGOs to directly introduce perspectives from local and diverse settings to policy-making processes. However, survey results suggest that NGOs use strategies to indirectly participate in policy-making because direct participation is not effective or easily available, despite government efforts. Survey responses indicate that limited resources and other factors constrain the direct participation of many NGOs, determining which organizations participate and whose knowledge is being incorporated in policy-making. These factors are unrecognized in participatory policy-making discourses used by the UNCCD and other global organizations.

The internal features of an organization condition its ability to participate directly in policy-making (Betsill and Corell, 2008; Rootes, 1999). Data collected from NGO representatives suggests that external factors like government-initiated participation have important consequences for NGO engagement, but that the internal features may be more limiting. External factors can determine the participation of the sector as a whole, whereas limited internal capacity can be a constraining feature for only some. Survey results indicate that respondents allocate few financial and human resources to directly participate in policy-making. This furthers the work of authors like Albin (1999), Pinkney (2009), and Gulbrandsen and Andresen (2004), who all identify internal features as limiting for participation in policy-making. Efforts could be more effective if they consider the asymmetries within the NGO sector and account for the limited capacity of interested organizations. Without this the opportunities presented through the Convention text are limited to NGOs with the capacity to participate.

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<sup>8</sup> The statements of NGOs were not validated or contested by other actors involved in these processes and should not be taken as completely reflective of actual processes. Further research and data from other involved actors may support or contest these claims. Nonetheless, they do illustrate the projected rationale for this sample's participation in policy-making.

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The participatory strategies employed by an NGO reflect its organizational capacity and the environment it operates in. Results suggest that the most common strategies used by NGOs to directly participate in policy-making include lobbying, attending, and speaking at policy negotiations, and submitting draft decisions to government officials. Respondents also shared strategies that allow them to indirectly participate in policy-making, such as informal communication with government officials, using social media to raise awareness, and building public support to influence policy-makers. Theoretically, indirect NGO participation can result in the reduction of their representation during formal policy-making processes and consequently weaken their direct input.

Direct participation in policy-making requires both financial and human resources that many organizations may not have, according to surveys conducted by Barr et al. (2004) and DENVIA (2006), and survey results here support this speculation. This may indicate that most NGOs do not have the capacity to directly engage in policy-making and therefore rely on indirect strategies. Many organizations implicitly stated in survey responses and NGO publications that they employed indirect strategies to inform and influence government officials as well as other important actors and civil society (ActionAid, 2012). The indirect participation of NGOs is a bottom-up action in the sense that organizations initiate these actions on behalf of the local communities they work with.

Respondents reported that verbal, as opposed to written, communication was a preferred method of participation for both direct and indirect strategies. This may be indicative of the few resources most NGOs allocate to participation. Nonetheless, this research and others found “the belief in the ‘power of speech’ is shared by many NGOs, irrespective of whether they are well funded” (Barr et al., 2004). Oral communication and records are central features of many African societies. This is significant because it demonstrates that cultural practices can determine how stakeholders communicate in policy-making, particularly how local and foreign NGOs may differ in their strategies to influence policy-makers through participation. Survey results show that most organizations choose to employ verbal strategies, which are thought to be well received by government officials who reportedly discard written reports (Obaikol, 2013). The emphasis placed on verbal communication, in both direct and indirect participation strategies, demonstrates that cultural context impacts the strategies NGOs use.

The structure of government-initiated participation unfolding under Convention text, as well as the global discourse on participatory policy-making, stems from Western and international influences. Some scholars have argued that these processes and the use of formal NGOs are foreign and unsuitable mechanisms to incorporate local knowledge into policy. For instance, Pinkney (2009: 58-59) argues “there is something un-African about replacing informal, local groups with bodies that seek formal registration (...) in contrast to the African tradition of meeting in the shade of the palaver tree and allowing everyone to speak”. Without delving into a discussion about the appropriateness of NGOs as representatives or messengers of civil society, the argument can be made that most small, rural NGOs are generally unacquainted with the formal processes of policy-making and therefore utilize indirect and potentially more familiar strategies to participate.

An additional pattern of NGO strategy identified in survey responses is the formation of large coalitions through umbrella organization memberships. This theme was also noted in Barr, et al. (2004)’s study, which indicated that the majority of surveyed organizations belong to umbrella organizations that were originally formed by NGOs but are now often funded by foreign donors. Umbrella organizations may be backed by foreign donors but are composed of smaller, rural organizations. They claim to match the efforts of large NGOs and act as representatives of small organizations, but the risk of co-opted agendas and homogenized interests in these major networks can reduce the benefits if they minimize or silence the interests of smaller members. However, NGOs with little

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experience but similar messages may be able to better participate under the organized and resourceful efforts of an umbrella organization, and thus potentially exert greater influence on policy-making processes (Obaikol, 2013). A review of grey literature produced by NGOs suggests that umbrella organizations may also provide opportunities for inexperienced organizations to learn more about policy analysis (Nyamugasira, 2007).

Indirect modes of participation may be appealing to organizations that have limited experience and capacity. This research supports the arguments of Brinkerhoff (1999) that NGOs do not need to be directly engaged in the policy cycle in order to exert some form of influence over decision-making. Respondents suggested they believe indirect strategies of participation (e.g., farming demonstrations) were impactful on government officials. Limited organizational capacity may not be the only explanation for the absence of small NGOs in formal policy-making processes; they may choose to engage indirectly with government officials to influence policy-making because they are more comfortable with these strategies and believe in their effectiveness.

Survey results contradict some findings in this field, though the scope of this research should be considered before generalizing its findings. The importance of government-NGO relations has been heavily credited in the literature with determining the participation of NGOs in policy-making, and this research recognizes the role of government in creating opportunities for participation (Tadesse, 2010; Tucker, 2014; Bouget & Prouteau, 2002). Yet, the reliance on indirect modes of participation suggests that, despite limited capacity, many organizations are attempting to influence policy-making outside of provided opportunities. The bottom-up NGO approach indicates that these actors recognize the significance of policy-making as a route for achieving their organizational and community goals. It additionally suggests that there may be alternative routes for increasing the participation of NGOs in policy-making that exist outside of traditional processes like policy negotiations. The initiation of participation, beginning with NGOs, suggests a willingness to engage in policy-making and an effort to work with multiple stakeholders to achieve goals like community development and sustainable land management.

Survey results support the statement by Lang (2013) that by indirectly participating in policy-making, NGOs are able to engage local communities and produce public goods. Outside of Kampala, there is synergy between the work NGOs do with communities and with the government. The data collected for this research indicates that NGOs work closely with local communities to educate them and learn about sustainable land management, and that they are increasingly working with government officials to help implement and formulate policy. The ability to work between public and private spheres appears to be one of the most valuable assets of small NGOs and is symbolic of their embodiment as a theoretical third sector. Therefore, categorizing NGOs as either service providers or policy advocates is no longer appropriate for the NGO sector in Uganda, an argument that has been made by Lister and Nyamugasira (2003).

This research has outlined the influence of factors on the NGO participatory strategies and how they can constrain them regardless of external opportunities to engage in policy-making processes. Despite limitations, this sector has found ways to become involved in policy-making outside of induced avenues. There are bottom-up methods that NGOs seem more familiar and comfortable with that are used to engage indirectly in policy-making. This research will now speculate on the perceived effectiveness of these types of participation in achieving the benefits of NGO engagement in policy-making.

Participation prescribed by the Convention text and Uganda's NAP seems to have resulted in some opportunities for NGOs to engage in policy-making. Survey results indicate NGOs have been invited by government to



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directly participate in policy-making processes like negotiations for the Uganda National Land Policy and National Agricultural Policy. Most NGOs reported allocating very few human and financial resources to directly participate in policy-making and have generally limited experience with policy-making processes. Such limited participation could significantly reduce potential benefits derived from incorporating local knowledge in policy. In spite of this, NGOs in Uganda seem to rely mainly on indirect participation strategies, which they believe enables them to influence policy-making successfully while making the most of their limited capacity.

### **5.3 MIXED NGOs PERCEPTION OF INFLUENCE OVER POLICY-MAKING THROUGH PARTICIPATION**

While government-initiated opportunities for direct participation in Ugandan policy-making do exist, they can be exclusive and not produce the democratic benefits of participation proclaimed in the literature. One of the objectives of participatory processes is to negotiate the power relations between actors so that different opinions and knowledge can be contributed (Sanderson & Kindon, 2004). Without attempts to counteract imbalances in power, participation will likely be dominated by NGOs with more resources, and may produce few perspectives in policy-making in lieu of the heterogeneous sector of actors from different issue-areas. Participation barriers for most NGOs are created by minimal internal capacity to engage in policy-making, which determines that policy-making is influenced most by those who contribute to it directly.

As discussed in the previous section, NGOs do not only participate in policy-making directly through government-initiated opportunity, but also indirectly through working with various audiences to influence policy-makers, such as civil society. Survey respondents generally reported that strategies used to influence government officials have been effective in contributing information to policy formation. All of the strategies reported by respondents in this regard were indirect, except for one example that involved contributing a written statement to a policy negotiation. Some respondents did not believe that their direct and indirect strategies were influential, but a majority did. The reflexivity of any actor must be considered subjective however, and it may be the case that other stakeholders like government officials disagree with this assessment. Nonetheless, there is strong belief among respondents in the effectiveness of both direct and indirect strategies.

While much of the literature speaks to the use of participatory strategies, there is a limitation in the assessment of the effectiveness of indirect attempts to influence policy-making. The influence of activities like informal meetings and social media are far more challenging to methodologically observe and analyze in comparison to those that occur in controlled settings, like policy negotiations. It can be speculated that indirect strategies are less likely to immediately impact policy-making processes than direct participation because they heavily rely on influencing policy-makers, the public, and other influential stakeholders in a variety of settings. Examples supplied by respondents indicate that these modes of participation are effective in raising awareness of land degradation and bringing civil society concerns to the attention of government. Before an evidenced claim can be made, more research is required in determining the effectiveness of indirect participation. Currently, much of the literature assessing participation effects focus on direct engagement, usually occurring at the global or national scale.

Overall, the literature is pessimistic about the influence NGOs can exert over policy-makers. Authors like Dur and De Bievre (2007) suggest that NGOs have hardly influenced policy-making and that this is partially due to their strategies. Other authors concur that they generally lack mobilization, funds, and experience in the field of

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policy negotiation and therefore have minimal opportunities to exert influence (Albin, 1999; Pollard & Court, 2008). These factors are considered influential in the context of NGO participation in policy-making, particularly in the limitations of direct participation. Survey respondents reported that despite limitations, there have been instances where their direct and indirect participation have contributed to policy-making. This research does not conclusively determine if and how NGOs have exerted influence in attempts to engage in policy-making, though it notes some variations from the literature in which strategies NGOs find most influential.

Much of what is known about NGO participation in policy-making happens in institutional settings, and some scholars argue that NGOs choose to participate in these forums instead of public venues (Lang, 2013). However, survey results and NGO grey literature suggests that this is not an accurate description of NGO participation in land degradation policy. In fact, this research furthers the claim of Du and De Bievre (2007) that NGOs need public support to influence policy-making. The reliance on public support to influence policy-making is evident in this research in many of the reported activities NGOs used to indirectly engage in policy-making. This suggests that there is more to learn regarding the strategies NGOs use within a country to participate in policy-making, and how factors both internal and external to organizations can affect this.

Participation through both direct and indirect means is indicative of the evolution of NGOs in Uganda towards involvement in policy-making and work beyond the scope of service delivery. In Uganda, this sector claims to act as a vehicle to traverse civil society concerns from communities to government. The findings of this research complement the general argument that NGOs are re-crafting how we understand land management. Nonetheless, these actors' strategies are highly conditioned by factors that determine how they engage in policy-making. While both the UNCCD and NAP have been instrumental in facilitating the participation of these stakeholders, factors in Uganda determine the extent and mode of involvement of NGOs. This can restrict the incorporation of NGO experience and local knowledge into policy-making. Despite the fact that many cannot directly participate due to limited resources and access, there is a notable trend in indirect participatory strategies that NGOs employ to attempt to influence policy-makers. While these findings are telling of NGO participation in national policy-making, they are confined to the context of Uganda and land degradation.



Ahmed El Ganzouri



# Limitations

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There are several limitations to the generalizability of these research results. This work does not assess the perspectives of key stakeholders beyond NGOs, such as government officials or donors, which are needed to triangulate and validate perceptions of influence (Betsill & Corell, 2008; Arts & Verschuren, 1999). These stakeholders were not consulted during the data collection process due to limited access and time constraints. It is because of this limitation that this major research paper does not declare if NGOs exert influence in Ugandan policy-making, but instead analyzes how and how much NGOs participate.

While the survey gathered some quantitative data, more could have been used to strengthen the case built in this major research paper. Quantitative research methods could have gathered more information about the number of NGOs involved in various stages of the policy cycle and how often direct and indirect strategies are employed. While quantitative methods are cautioned against for the measurement of influence by some authors (Betsill and Corell (2001; 2008)); they are practical tools that allow for greater objectivity during research, and methods that allow for easily replicable data analysis and therefore comparisons across time and space.

An online survey was chosen as a method for data collection because it allows for a wide array of respondents to contribute information. This survey yielded limited information with a response rate of 5.7%. Low response rates for online surveys can occur because invited respondents have limited incentive to answer them, and sometimes have limited internet access. A low number of responses required the author to limit the scope of the conclusions so as not to inflate the applicability of these results. Online surveys could also lead to self-selection of respondents, i.e., have representatives from NGOs with limited capacity more likely to answer an online survey, which fits in well with indirect participation<sup>9</sup>. A more efficient data collection method for this research would have been telephone or face-to-face interviews. While these methods are more time consuming and therefore may limit the number of participants, they generally yield more information, allow for follow-up questions, and can potentially gather more comprehensive insights than a survey. These data collection methods may have provided more fruitful information than online surveys about the participation of NGOs in policy-making in this project.

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9 Thanks to Mr. Meetu Vijay for pointing this out.

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The participation of NGOs in Ugandan policy-making related to land degradation is a very specific scope for research, which limits the generalizability of these findings. Additionally, very little research has been conducted on NGO participation in policy-making in developing countries, particularly Uganda, and other scholars have noted the limited work conducted in this field (Gulbrandsen & Andresen, 2004; Gemmill & Bamidele-Izu, 2002; Hirsch, 2007; Barr, et al., 2004). The novelty and specificity of this research may have limited the generalizability of its results but also helps to lay the groundwork for future research.





UNU-INWEH, Corinne Schuster-Wallace





## Conclusion, Implications, and Future Research

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Land degradation is a devastating and rapidly increasing issue for over a billion people, contributing to complications in tourism, agricultural, and related industries around the world. A current global approach to mitigating this issue involves the participation of stakeholders at all levels of policy-making to develop holistic land management practices. NGOs were selected as the primary unit of analysis for this research due to their increasing presence as stakeholders in policy-making and reputation as representatives of civil society.

Many NGOs participating in policy-making processes relating to land degradation issues in Uganda seem to rely on indirect strategies because they are unable to engage directly in policy-making through direct government-initiated opportunities, due to limited organizational capacity. This means that the direct participation of NGOs in policy-making is unlikely to be representative of the NGO sector and civil society. A post-structuralist framework in this research has allowed for an analysis of this sector as both public and private. Furthermore, this framework enables this research to consider how participation is determined by opportunities to participate as well as the internal capacity of organizations.

This research has shown that some NGOs are actively trying to contribute to policy-making through a mix of direct and indirect participation. This research has identified potential constraints on direct NGO participation in land degradation policy-making in Uganda, such as limited human and financial resources, as well as efforts to overcome such limitations through indirect participation strategies. NGOs that participate in direct and indirect policy-making tend to have strong network building skills. It can be concluded that efforts to promote participatory policy-making processes must take into consideration both the opportunity and capacity to participate in order to be successful.

This research can inform the work of NGOs in Uganda as it assesses the various opportunities available for participation, as well as strategies organizations can employ when working with government officials. Small NGOs in Uganda may find the following activities to be beneficial in increasing their participation in policy-making: attending workshops to increase research and policy analysis skills; raising funds independently to finance participation in policy-making processes and increase ownership of issue-positions; increasing the number of staff knowledgeable about policy-making; using public support and spreading awareness of methods through social media; and maintaining important partnerships with other NGOs, government officials and technocrats, and CBOs. These

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suggestions are a needed complement to provided government opportunities, as they are bottom-up opportunities that can be built upon. Nonetheless, government should also be made aware of the limits of extending opportunities to NGOs with minimal capacity to engage and instead develop indirect opportunities for organizations to contribute information and increase their skills, such as making themselves available to NGOs who cannot attend conferences through telephone calls or local visits. Overall, this research can provide NGOs working in Uganda with information about participating in policy-making and potential options for future engagement.

In addition to benefiting NGOs in Uganda, this research also contributes to the efforts of the ELD Initiative. The Initiative aims to raise awareness from the local to the national and international levels of the economic benefits of sustainable land management and promote pathways for effective action. The ELD Initiative works with various stakeholders (including NGOs) and is based on collaborative knowledge sharing and combining efforts between various stakeholders to ensure effective action at various scales. This research contributes to knowledge of barriers to participation in policy-making. It suggests that building the human and financial capacity of NGOs could increase NGO participation into policy-making and therefore potentially promote more effective action.

Further investigation in this topic can provide useful and important information about how decisions are being made in developing countries and who contributes the knowledge that informs them. There are several ways this research could be expanded:

- » Using a larger and more diverse sample of NGOs from Uganda to learn more about how participation varies across different issues and organizations with varying capacity. This should include quantifying how much funding NGOs receive (particularly from foreign donors) and which NGOs are receiving this, in order to understand to what extent this feature of organizational capacity contributes to different forms of participation.
- » Diversifying the types of stakeholders consulted on NGO participation in policy-making processes as well as their own participation, and respective perceived influence. Such stakeholders could include government officials, academics, UNCCD Secretariat, UNCCD country representatives, the ELD Secretariat, and relevant partners.
- » Investigate the participation of NGOs in policy-making processes in a developing country using different data collection methods. Interviews conducted through telephone calls, video calls, or face-to-face could provide more comprehensive accounts of NGO experiences in policy-making.
- » Investigate the “inside influence going out”<sup>10</sup>, i.e., whether NGOs participation to international events such as UNCCD conferences is a successful way to build pressure on and successfully influence their national government.
- » Investigate the “outside influence coming in”, i.e., how foreign NGOs working through local ones, usually in the form of funding, may influence national policy-making.<sup>11</sup> For instance, assessing government attitudes towards internationally sanctioned and funded participation of NGOs in policy-making studies the subject of top-down initiated participatory policy-making from the perspective of other stakeholders.

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10 I am very grateful to Dr. Zafar Adeel for suggesting this.

11 Many thanks to Dr. Zafar Adeel for suggesting this.



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## APPENDIX A: UNCCD ARTICLES

These articles demonstrate the participatory approach to policy-making supported by the UNCCD.

UNCCD ARTICLE	PARTICIPATION TEXT
<p><b>Article 9 (1)</b></p> <p><b>BASIC APPROACH</b></p>	<p>... Such programmes shall be updated through a continuing participatory process on the basis of lessons from field action, as well as the results of research. The preparation of national action programmes shall be closely interlinked with other efforts to formulate national policies for sustainable development.</p>
<p><b>Article 10 (2)</b></p> <p><b>NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMS</b></p>	<p>National action programmes shall specify the respective roles of government, local communities and land users and the resources available and needed. They shall, inter alia:</p> <p>(f) Provide for effective participation at the local, national and regional levels of non-governmental organizations and local populations, both women and men, particularly resource users, including farmers and pastoralists and their representative organizations, in policy planning, decision-making, and implementation and review of national action programmes;</p>
<p><b>Article 13 (1)</b></p> <p><b>SUPPORT FOR THE ELABORATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PROGRAMS</b></p>	<p>Measures to support action programmes pursuant to article 9 include, inter alia:</p> <p>(b) Elaboration and use of cooperation mechanisms which better enable support at the local level, including action through non-governmental organizations, in order to promote the replicability of successful pilot programme activities where relevant;</p>

## APPENDIX B: CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE

This certificate of ethics clearance to involve human participants in research was received from the McMaster University Research Ethics Board on April 28, 2014.

 <small>Inspiring Innovation and Discovery</small>	<b>McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)</b> <small>c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support, MREB                  Secretariat, GH-30541, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca</small>		
<b>CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH</b>			
Application Status: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New <input type="checkbox"/> Addendum   Project Number: 2014 048			
<b>TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:</b> Studies on Globalization and the Improvement of the Human Condition			
<b>Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)</b>	<b>Dept./Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>E-Mail</b>
S. McBride	Political Science	23707	mcbride@mcmaster.ca
<b>Co-Investigator(s):</b> E. Quillerou			
<b>Student Investigator(s)</b>	<b>Dept./Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>E-Mail</b>
H. McComick	Political Science	905-328-849	mccomh@mcmaster.ca
<b>Co-Investigator(s):</b>			
The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB.			
<input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as presented without questions or requests for modification. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below.			
<b>COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and cleared before any alterations are made to the research.</b>			
<b>Reporting Frequency:</b>		<b>Annual:</b> Apr-28-2015	<b>Other:</b>
<b>Date:</b> Apr-28-2014		Acting Chair, Dr. D. Pawluch 	

## APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTIONS

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The following survey was electronically sent to roughly 250 NGO representatives working to combat land degradation in Uganda. It was emailed to invited respondents using an online survey service called Fluid Service ©. This survey has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board on April 28, 2014. The assigned protocol number for this survey is 2014 048.

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### PARTICIPATING IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

This survey is administered by Haley McCormick, of the Institute for Water, Environment and Health at the United Nations University and the Institute on Globalization and the Improvement of the Human Condition at McMaster University. The purpose of this survey is to understand how NGOs influence the formation of land degradation policy in Uganda. Information gathered during this survey will be written up as a report.

To learn more about the survey and the researcher's study please read the accompanying letter of information. This survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. People filling out this survey must be affiliated with a NGO in Uganda.

This survey is part of a study that has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB). The MREB protocol number associated with this survey is 2014 048. You are free to complete this survey or not. If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat  
Telephone +1-905 525-9140 ext. 23142  
C/o Research Office for Administration, Development  
and Support (ROADS)  
E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information on this survey and my research

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**1) How many years have you worked with government officials to develop land degradation policy?**

*Government officials may include a mayor, government ministers, or civil servants.*

*Working with government officials may mean providing them with information about land degradation, trying to influence the content of policy by attending conferences or policy negotiations, or similar activities.*

- » 0-1
- » 1-5
- » 5-10
- » 10-15
- » 15-20
- » 20+

**2) How many members of your staff, including you, discuss land degradation issues with Ugandan government officials?**

- » 1-5
- » 5-15
- » 15-25
- » 25+

**3) What is your organization's official stance on land degradation? Please describe this stance and how your organization's policy goals address land degradation in the space provided below.**

**4) Please select all groups that your organization works with when contributing to the development of land degradation policy.**

*Please select any answers that apply.*

- » Government offices (local, regional, national)
- » NGOs
- » Community groups and organizations
- » Researchers
- » News agencies
- » Schools, colleges or universities
- » Other

**5) Is some of your organization's budget dedicated to working with government officials to influence land degradation policy?**

*Can you please provide some details about funds dedicated to this type of policy advocacy and what resources they provide for (i.e. lobbyists) in the space below.*

- » Yes
- » No

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**6) Please select all events at which you or other representatives of your organization have discussed land degradation policies with government officials.**

- » Town halls/community meetings
- » Conferences/group meetings hosted by government ministries, departments or agencies
- » Policy negotiations (meetings where policy is debated and created)
- » Formal meetings with civil servants or government ministers
- » Other

**7) Please estimate the number of times you or your colleagues have attended a meeting with a government official to discuss land degradation. How did you promote your organization's goals during these events?**

*Please provide examples of actions that spread your organization's stance on land degradation in these meetings. Please describe any results of these efforts (i.e. bringing a new issue about land degradation into policy discussions).*

**8) Please estimate the number of policy negotiations relating to land degradation your organization has participated in the space below. Please select the ways that you or representatives of your organization participated in these negotiations.**

*Policy negotiations occur at formal conferences or forums where policies are openly discussed and produced.*

*Please select all answers that apply.*

Number of negotiations your organization has attended:

- » Contributed written document(s)
- » Contributed verbal technical information about land degradation
- » Contributed verbal stance on land degradation
- » Introduced information that caused the discussion to consider new policy action
- » Contributed information that was included in final policy document
- » Defined a term or issue
- » Spoke informally with government official(s) about possible policy action
- » Formed partnership with another policy actor
- » Other:

**9) Has your organization contributed to a discussion on land degradation with government officials that led to new information being used in policy?**

*If possible, please provide examples of the information and policies.*

**10) Can you please indicate if you or a representative of your organization has attended policy negotiations for any of the following policies?**

*Please select all answers that apply.*

- » The Uganda National Land Policy
- » Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture
- » National Development Plan
- » National Agriculture Policy
- » Lands, Housing and Urban Development Sector Strategic Plan

- 
- » Agriculture Development Strategy Plan
  - » Regional policy:
  - » Local policy:
  - » Other:

**11) Do policies that your organization helped to develop reflect your organization's goals regarding land degradation?**

*Please provide some examples.*

**12) Please select any of the following activities that you or your colleagues participated in to promote your organization's stance on land degradation?**

*Please select all answers that apply.*

- » Lobbied government offices
- » Hosted seminars or information sessions about land degradation and its effects on communities
- » Made formal statements (written or verbal) to government
- » Written a newsletter
- » Submitted information or draft decisions to negotiations over land degradation policy
- » Coordinate action with other NGOs (conferences, meetings)
- » Other:

**13) Have you submitted to government officials a written position your organization takes on land degradation? If yes, please indicate which of the following below:**

*Please select all answers that apply.*

- » Newsletter
- » Pamphlet
- » Research report
- » Letter
- » Information leaflet
- » Draft policy text
- » Other:

**14) Can you please share how effective the activities mentioned in the previous two questions have been in achieving your organization's goals regarding land degradation policy in Uganda? Why do you think these efforts have been effective?**

*Please provide examples of some activities your organization had used to influence land degradation policy.*

**15) Do you believe that information your organization has shared with government officials has altered their stance on land degradation policies?**

*An example of this activity may be proposing possible solutions or explanations for local conditions. Please include examples if possible.*

---

**16) While interacting with government officials have you had an opportunity to define an issue relating to land degradation?**

*If you have provided a definition can you please explain the context in which it was given and the definition beside 'yes'.*

- » Yes
- » No

**17) Has your organization provided government ministries or policy makers with verbal information about your stance on land degradation? If yes, which of the following:**

- » Statement of information at a town meeting
- » Statement of information at a conference
- » Statement of information at a policy negotiation
- » Information session about your organization
- » Seminar/discussion group on your organization
- » Other:

**18) Have you provided information directly to a government official through either a meeting, phone call, or casual interaction? If you have provided information through another form of interaction please note what this is and how often it occurs below.**

*Beside 'yes' please indicate other forms of interaction.*

- » Yes
- » No

**19) Has your organization been asked by government officials to provide information about local conditions of land degradation and how communities are coping with them? Can you please explain to what extent you think this information has influenced official policy decisions?**

**20) Has your organization been asked by government officials to contribute verbal or written information about technical advice and/or solutions for land degradation?**

*Technical information may include farming methods, sustainable land practices, water usage, or amount of land degradation in the area where your organization works*

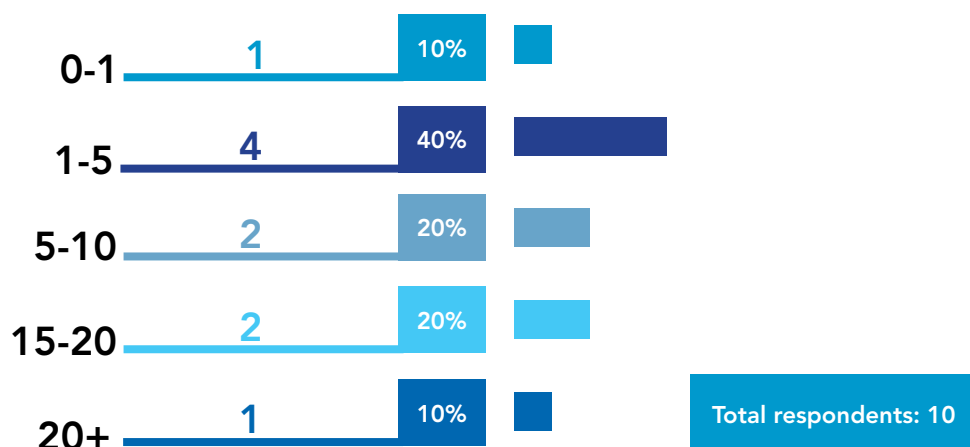
- » Yes
- » No



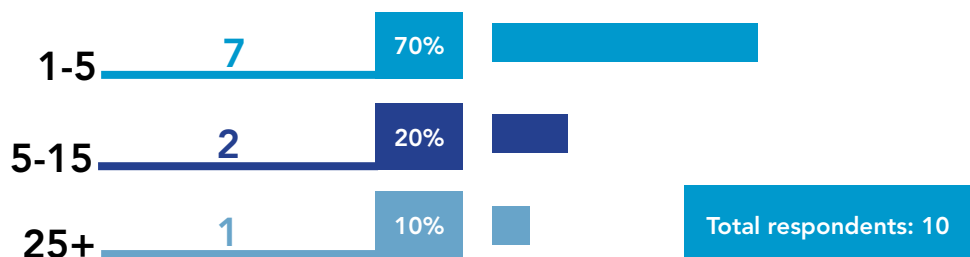
## APPENDIX D: SURVEY RESPONSES

Below are the responses NGO representatives gave to the online survey. When possible, their responses were visually presented in bar graphs. All information that could identify the representative or NGO has been removed.

1) How many years have you worked with government officials to develop land degradation policy?



2) How many members of your staff, including you, discuss land degradation issues with Ugandan government officials?



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**3) What is your organization's official stance on land degradation? Please describe this stance and how your organization's policy goals address land degradation in the space provided below:**

*"sustainable development calls for judicious use of natural resources in such a manner that there is equity consideration. We should exploit for the benefit of the present as we conserve for the future."*

*"(...)s goal is to improve the lives on the poor and underserved in Uganda. 90% of Ugandan rely on agriculture as a source of livelihoods. (...)s stance is to empower community members with know and skills so that they can sustainably handle issues of land degradation."*

*"As (...), our emphasis is on advocating for promotion and adoption of low cost sustainable innovations. we would like every policy document underscore use community adoption as well government funding of practices that the society that associate with for purposes of sustainability beyond government, project or NGO financial support."*

*"As (...) we place emphasis on sustainable innovations that are contextualized to the community to which they are promoted. We advocate for promotions of practices that society will easily take up post Government/NGO support (that is what entails policy/project sustainability)"*

*"Our organization is reviving soil and water conservation methods including improving the organic matter in the soil by employing organic farming methodologies."*

*"(...) condemns land degradation in all forms. For this, it discourages bush burning, monocropping and use of synthetic fertilisers which eventually degrades the land"*

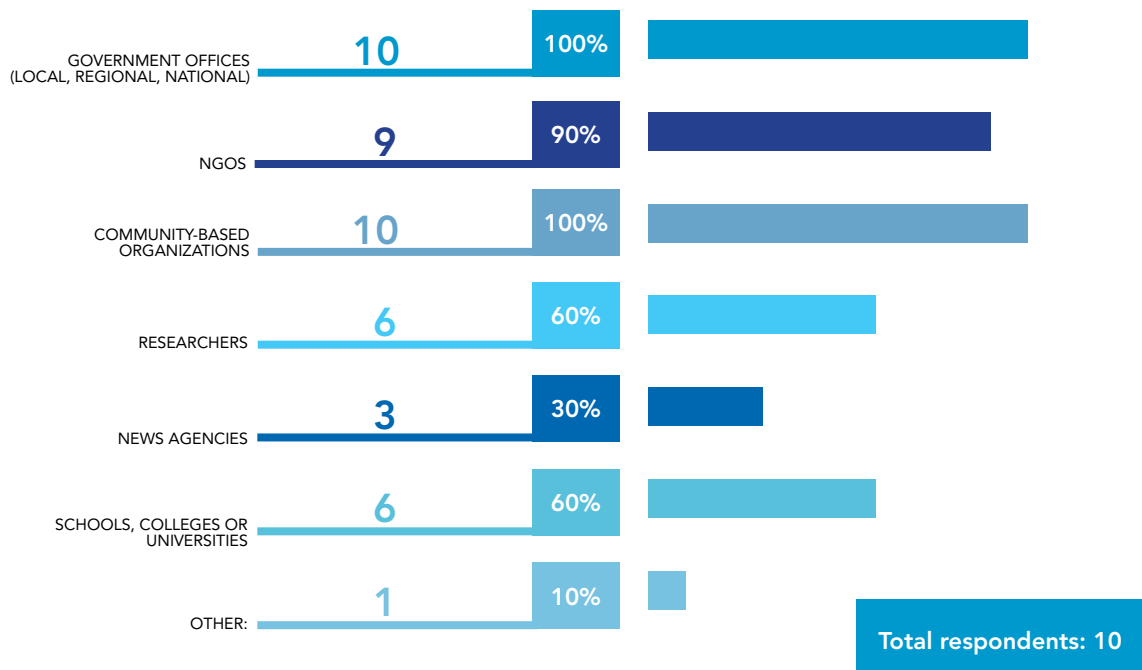
*"(...) works to promote prudent resource generation and utilization for the benefit of ugandan population. improving land use management is one the core issues in improving agricultural performance which employs over 70% of the population. the organization has worked in collaboration with Uganda land alliance and environmental activists to consolidate CSO advocacy."*

*"We are concerned about land degradation because its a key driver of climate change creating a lot of challenges for the small holder farmer and the population at large"*

*“Government policy on land degradation is not strong enough. There is no deliberate effort taken by government to ease pressure on wood biomass resource- a key component of environmental stability. As organisation, we endeavour to and train communities on wise use of natural resources especially trees in the environment”*

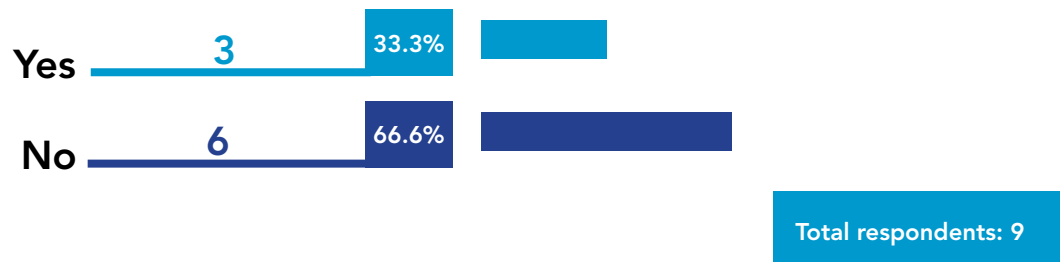
*“Land degradation is a big problem for the next generation. We (...) have to fight hard to protect our land and environment for the safety of our future generation.”*

**4) Please select all groups that your organization works with when contributing to the development of land degradation policy.**



**OTHER:**  
*“Chiefdoms”*

5) Is some of your organization's budget dedicated to working with government officials to influence land degradation policy?

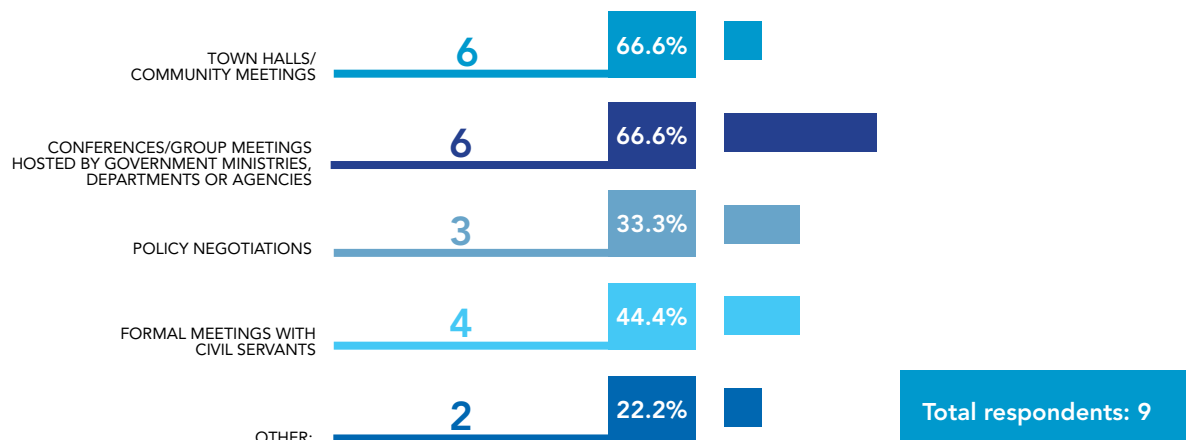


**YES:**

*"UDN has a budget line dedicated for advocacy on a wide range of policy issues and media engagements to amplify advocacy efforts with policy makers as well as collaboration with other organizations"*

*"For joint monitoring of project activities on ground & mobilisation"*

6) Please select all events at which you or other representatives of your organization have discussed land degradation policies with government officials.



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**OTHER:**

*"Budget advocacy work"*

*"Breakfast meetings with government and CSOs; training; NGO meetings"*

**7) Please estimate the number of times you or your colleagues have attended a meeting with a government official to discuss land degradation. How did you promote your organization's goals during these events?**

*"Very many times"*

*"About 4 time, and we were soliciting district support in promoting agricultural loans and soil and water conservation skills."*

*"About Five meeting during the Development of the Uganda National Fertilizer Sub-Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan. I was part of the Consulting Team. Also participated in Validation Workshop for the National Fertilizer Policy"*

*"Since 1994 Our organization has been dealing with issues regarding land degradation. We have on average 15 staff members who always talk about this issue"*

*"Radio and TV debates"*

*"(...) advocacy has not been specific on land degradation as a stand a lone but overall on agricultural structural reforms, financing, land use management, extension service delivery and accountability of duty bearers"*

*"Eight since 2009."*

---

8) Please estimate the number of policy negotiations relating to land degradation your organization has participated in the space below. Please select the ways that you or representatives of your organization participated in these negotiations.

Number of negotiations your organization has attended:

*"5 times"*

*"7"*

*"12"*

*"5"*

*"6 meetings on average a year at national level and 43 meetings at local level (sub county and District) where agriculture, environment and degradation issues have been presented and discussed"*

**CONTRIBUTED WRITTEN DOCUMENT:**

*"A guide to farmers - Sustainable Agric practices and technologies"*

*"(...) facilitate Community Based Organization to participate in planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring development activities in their localities in 24 districts in Uganda and produce bi annual monitoring reports which inform bi annual dialogue"*

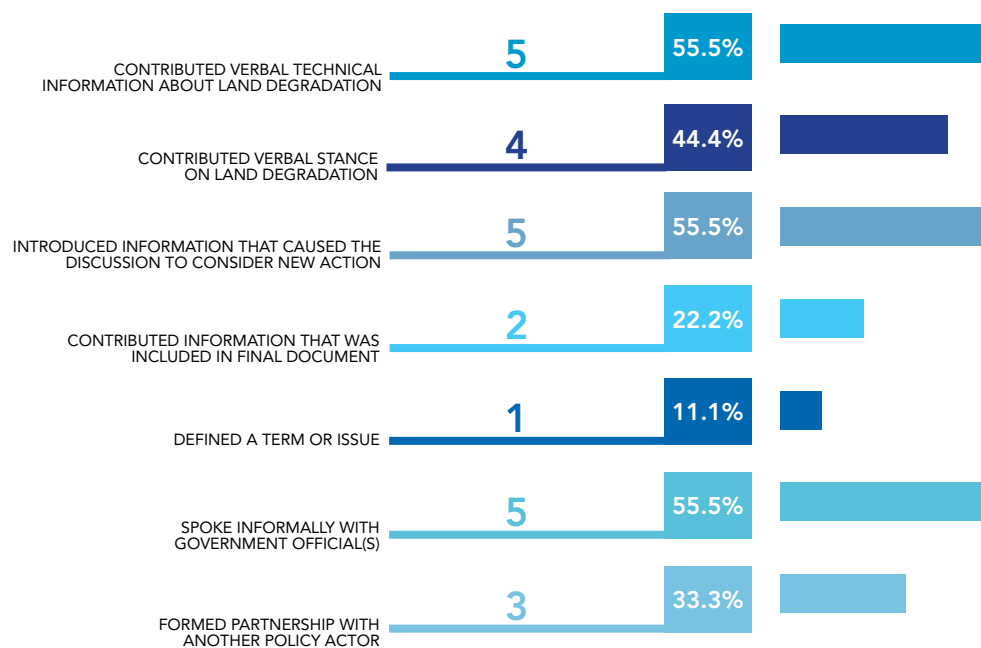
**FORMED PARTNERSHIP WITH ANOTHER POLICY ACTOR:**

*"Uganda Land Alliance, Government and grass root community based organizations"*

*"Participatory Land Use Management (PELUM-Uganda)"*

*"Regional Network (PELUM)"*

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Total respondents: 9

**9) Has your organization contributed to a discussion on land degradation with government officials that led to new information being used in policy?**

*"Not sure"*

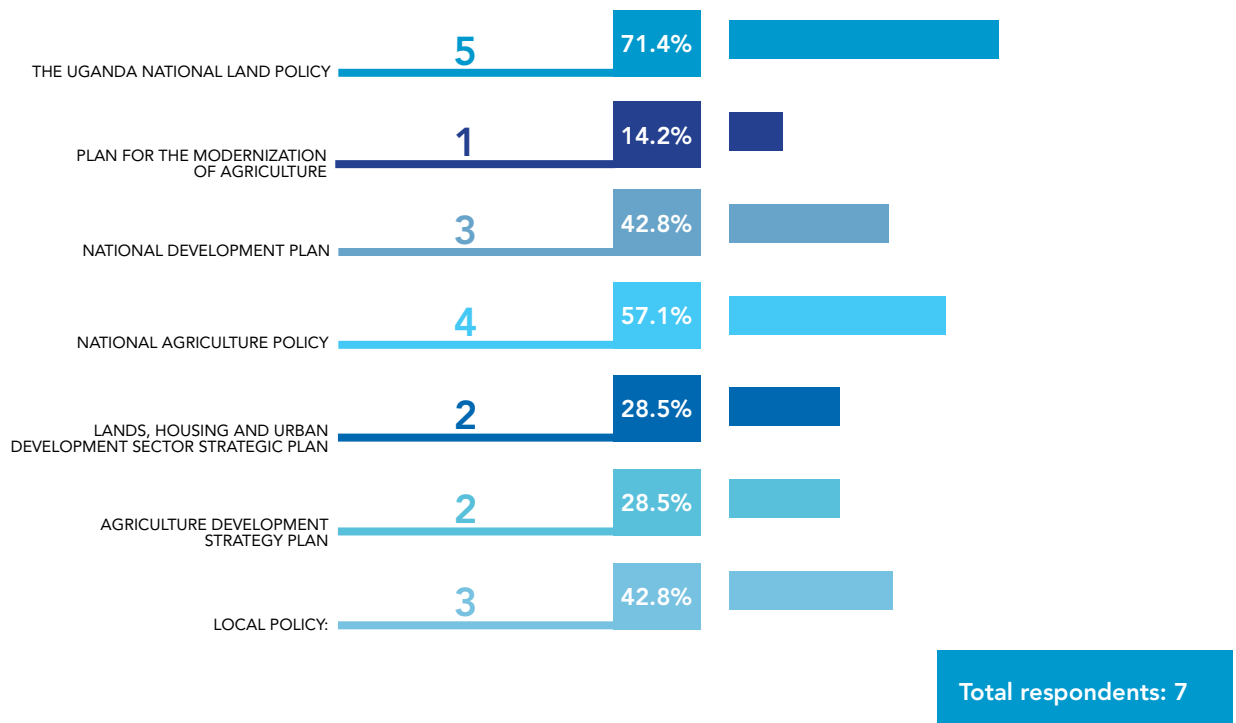
*"Yes"*

*"Yes, National Fertilizer Policy"*

*"As a member (...) we have done this regularly"*

*"Was involved in publishing a "Review of Agric related policies that support sustainable agriculture and Climate Change adaptation."*

10) Can you please indicate if you or a representative of your organization has attended policy negotiations for any of the following policies?



**LOCAL POLICY:**

*“National Fertilizer Policy, Uganda National Fertilizer Sub-Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan”*

*“District Land office consultative meetings”*

**OTHER:**

*“The National Agricultural Advisory Services”*



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**11) Do policies that your organization helped to develop reflect your organization's goals regarding land degradation?**

*"Yes"*

*"Compulsory tree planting is being encouraged by the National forestry Authority and this is one of our goals of saving future generation by planting trees today"*

*"Yes, For example the Uganda National Fertilizer Sub-Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan encourages use of Kitchen Wood Ash as Fertilizer which is a sustainable innovation as Ash is homemade and free."*

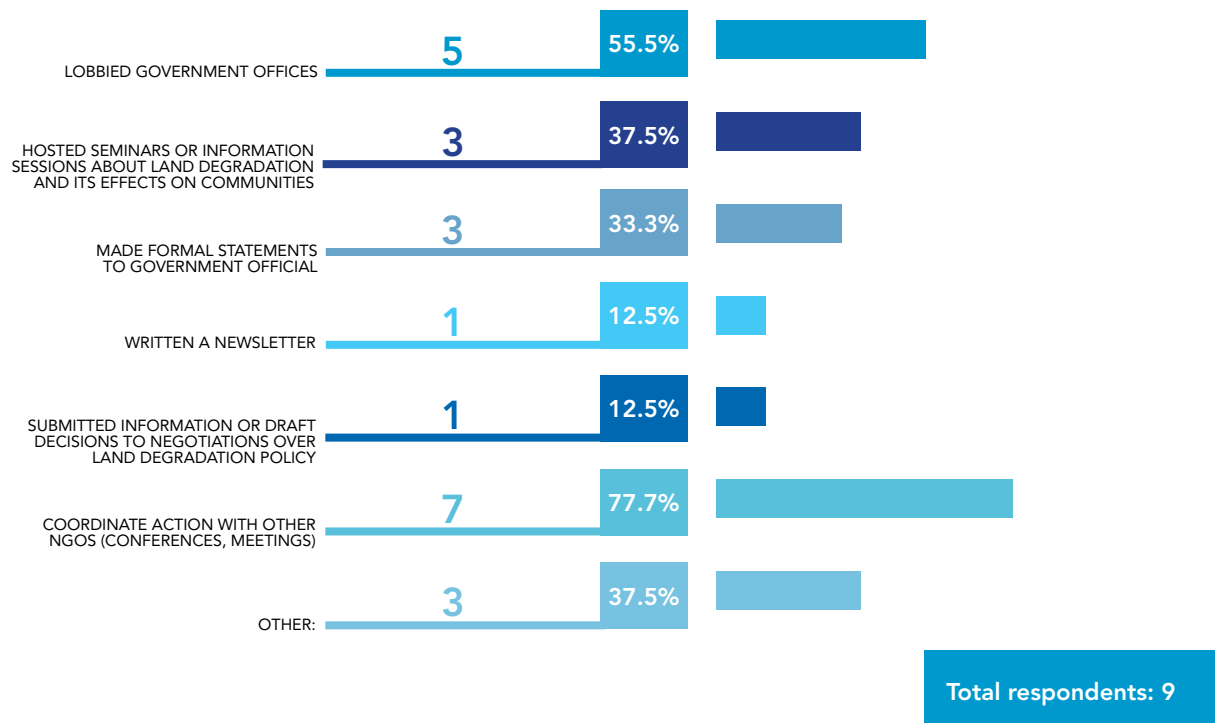
*"Yes"*

*"The National Seed Policy and Biosafety Bill"*

*"Emphasis on environmental impact assessment of all big development projects by government or private investors, public sensitization on the land use and management laws, strengthening and facilitation of district sub county environment departments to deliver on their mandate through budget advocacy etc. However, while the policy exist, there is weak or poor implementation and enforcement of already existing national bye laws influenced by politics of the day"*

*"We can only provide information and what comes out as policy is influenced by many factors"*

12) Please select any of the following activities that you or your colleagues participated in to promote your organization's stance on land degradation?



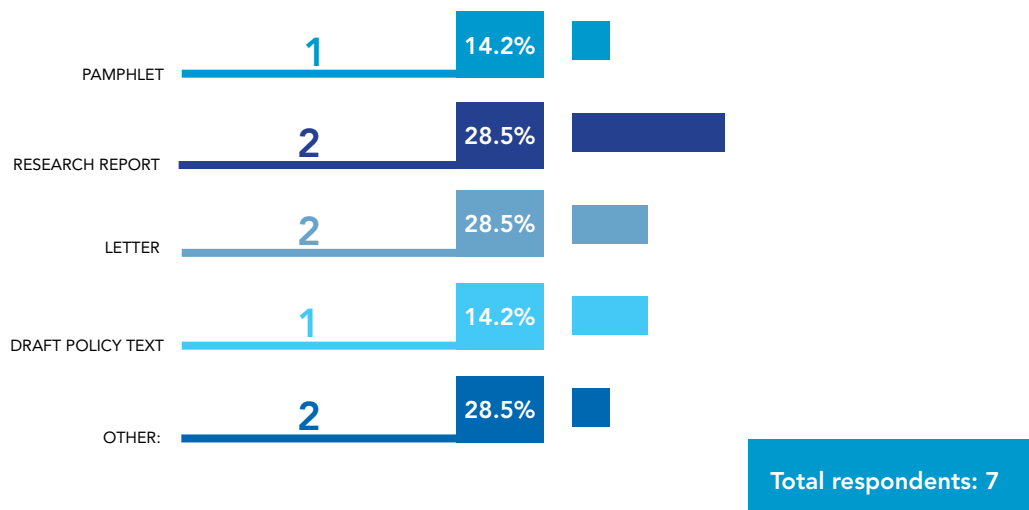
**OTHER:**

*"TV and radio talk shows"*

*"Use social Media (Facebook and Twitter)"*

*"Trained community members in improved sustainable agriculture and land management"*

13) Have you submitted to government officials a written position your organization takes on land degradation? If yes, please indicate which of the following below:



**OTHER:**

*"Conference papers"*

*"Activity/project reports"*

14) Can you please share how effective the activities mentioned in the previous two questions have been in achieving your organization's goals regarding land degradation policy in Uganda? Why do you think these efforts have been effective?

*"We have never received any back since we wrote to them, so we cant tell whether our appeals were considered and incorporated or not"*

*"Fairly effective. Some ideas are reflected in policy. Policies are never implemented"*

---

*"At community level, agricultural loans and trainings in soil and water conservation has improved lives although it has not had a direct impact on policy"*

*"They have a direct relationship with law-makers who are invited in these meetings"*

*"generating public debate in the media involving those affected by land degradation and poor land management for example mining areas. Participation in joint annual review of decentralization influenced commitment and recommendation that require local governments to plant trees annually in public institutions and households"*

**15) Do you believe that information your organization has shared with government officials has altered their stance on land degradation policies?**

*"Not sure"*

*"Yes"*

*"No"*

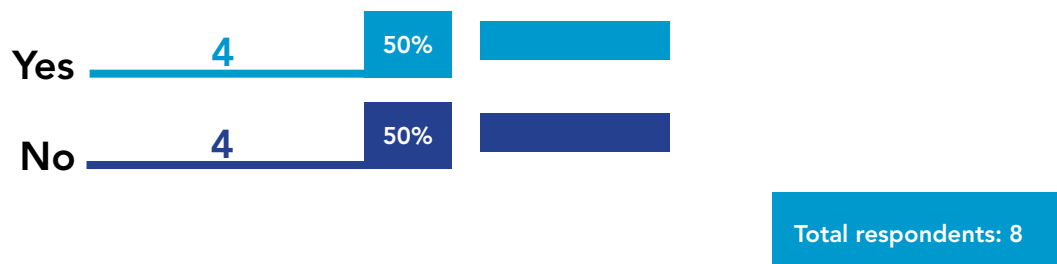
*"Interacted with officials from PMA secretariat and saw how organic farming deals with land degradation which informed the policy"*

*"Yes. The President has recently changed his view on the work of National Forest Authority. The ministry of agriculture is developing a new policy for provision of single spine extension services and streamlining the production department at local government level for effective land management to increase agriculture production and productivity. CSO position was included in the land policy through consistent advocacy and CSO statement presented to the Minister of Agriculture was discussed at cabinet"*

*"I think it has been informative"*

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16) While interacting with government officials have you had an opportunity to define an issue relating to land degradation?



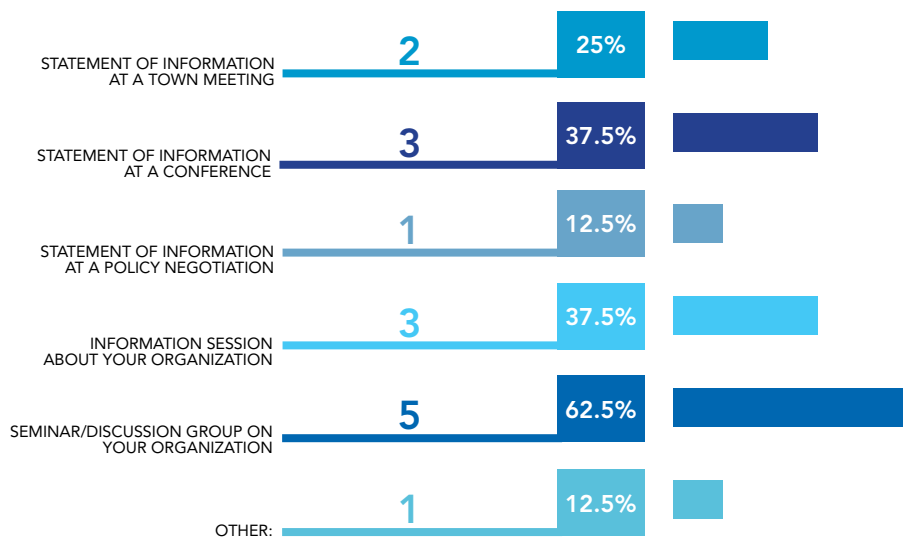
**WRITTEN RESPONSES:**

*"The issue of the Municipal Council offices failing to manage garbage disposal and polythene bags had been discussed verbally, in a letter and on radio. The Municipal needs to work on this problem otherwise the whole municipal land is being wasted by polythene bags and other garbage"*

*"This was in the context of duplication of roles among various agricultural extension officers at local level and poor coordination"*

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17) Has your organization provided government ministries or policy makers with verbal information about your stance on land degradation? If yes, which of the following:



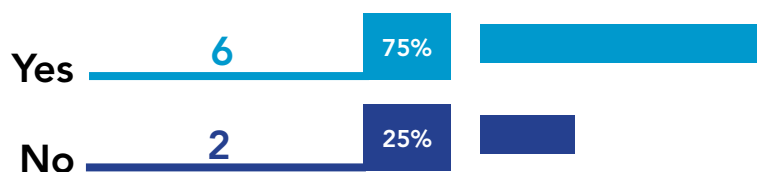
Total respondents: 8

**OTHER:**

*“On a government owned Radio station raising our environmental and healthy concerns regarding poor disposal of garbage and the stationing of garbage skips next to our operation premises”*

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18) Have you provided information directly to a government official through either a meeting, phone call, or casual interaction? If you have provided information through another form of interaction please note what this is and how often it occurs below.



Total respondents: 8

**OTHER:**

*"Social media (Twitter) weekly"*

*"We use Radio programmes like the Farmers Radio Talks shows where one member of our organization discusses on air about such issues pertaining the environment. Also we also call on radio to air our views when radio programmes on land degradation re being aired. We call the District veterinary officer on telephone about our activities and our concerns for example about poor garbage management in the Municipal. Our board members visit the district officials, department of production, department of Veterinary and animal production and discuss our organizations concerns with the respective officials"*

*"Information has been shared with government through lobby meetings and dissemination workshops"*

---

19) Has your organization been asked by government officials to provide information about local conditions of land degradation and how communities are coping with them? Can you please explain to what extent you think this information has influenced official policy decisions?

*"Local government of (...) is interacting with our organization to develop a policy on land degradation"*

*"Yes our farmers have given information to many agencies but cannot know at what level it affects the policy actions taken by government"*

*"We have been asked by NGO officials not government officials. By NGOs, through responding to the NGOs, they then forward these concerns to government as fourth arms of government in developing countries like Uganda"*

*"No"*

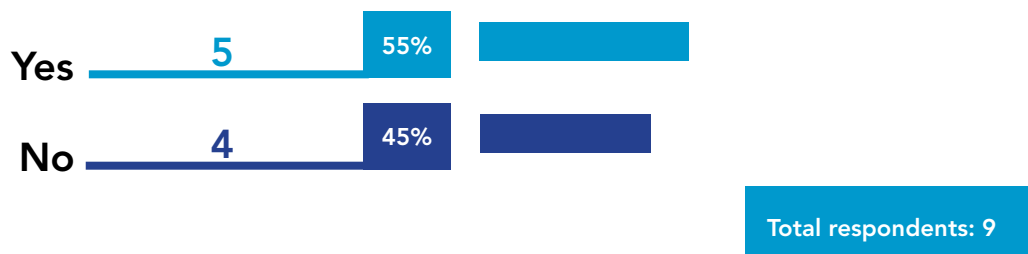
*"No"*

*"No"*

*"No"*

*"Yes, but once information is provided, there is no feedback on how it is used"*

20) Has your organization been asked by government officials to contribute verbal or written information about technical advice and/or solutions for land degradation?





## APPENDIX E: REPORT TO NGOS

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The following report was made available via email to NGOs that participated in the survey used in this project. The report was made available in August 2014.

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The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) calls for the participation of non-government actors in formal policy-making processes. Since ratifying this Convention the government of Uganda seems to have provided more opportunities for NGOs to participate in policy-making related to land degradation, for instance through formal consultations and negotiations. Other factors however, such as minimal experience with policy-making processes, have been outlined in the literature as potentially limiting the direct participation of NGOs in formal policy-making processes.

This report presents the results of a survey taken in April-June 2014 that NGO representatives participated in, as part of research undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in globalization studies and the requirements for the water without borders post-graduate certificate. The full major research paper corresponding to this survey and including anonymized survey results<sup>1</sup> is available upon request at <http://inweh.unu.edu/reports>.

This survey was conducted due to a knowledge gap in understanding how and why NGOs actually participate in national policy-making and which factors limit their participation, particularly in a developing world context. The main objective of the survey was to learn why, how, and how much NGOs participate in Ugandan policy-making in relation to land degradation.

This survey consisted of 20 questions that NGO representatives answered online. Both local and foreign NGOs that work in Uganda were asked to participate and a total of 10 answers were collected.

The general finding is that NGOs in Uganda participate in policy-making processes directly through interaction with government officials in formal settings, as well as indirectly, i.e. outside of formal processes and with many different actors. However, NGOs seem to consistently rely on indirect strategies to influence policy-making even when provided opportunities by government to directly participate, potentially due to limited human and financial resources allocated to participation.

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<sup>1</sup> McCormick, H. (2014) Participation Of NGOs to Land Degradation Policy-Making in Uganda: Is Opportunity To Participate Enough? Major Research Paper in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts Degree in Globalization Studies and the Requirements for the Water Without Borders Post-Graduate Certificate.

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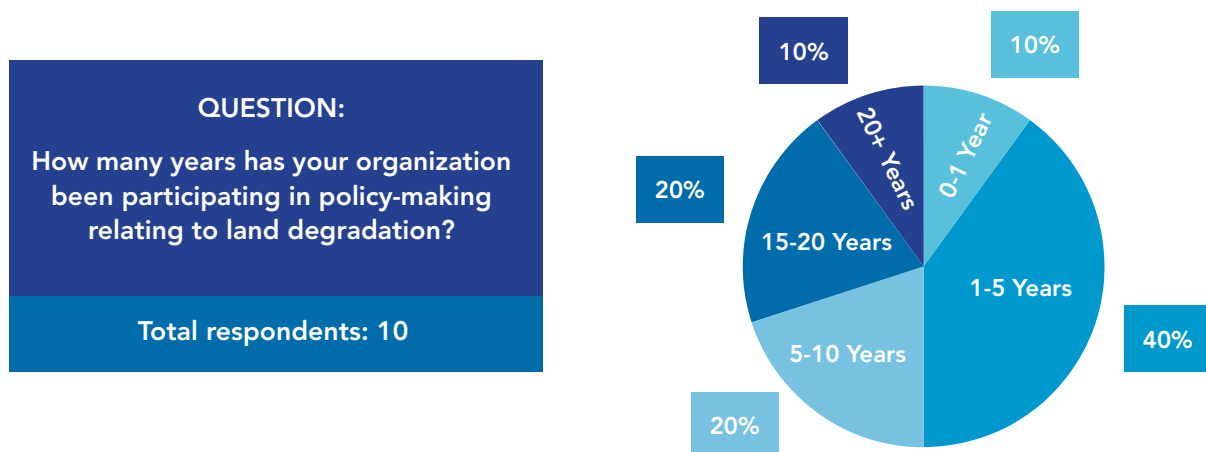
Your organization may find the suggestions at the end of this report useful for reviewing and developing strategies for increased participation in policy-making.

### NGO INVOLVEMENT IN POLICY-MAKING RELATED TO LAND DEGRADATION IN UGANDA

The results of this survey suggest that respondents have been able to directly participate in policy-making processes but also attempt to indirectly influence the policy-making processes. NGO representatives are aware of barriers to influencing government policy on land degradation and simultaneously believe that this is an important arena through which land degradation can be combatted. While NGOs have directly participated in policy-making, they also indirectly participate through activities like informal meetings, phone calls, information seminars, and networking with other actors.

### WHAT RESOURCES (STAFF AND BUDGET) DO NGOs ALLOCATE FOR PARTICIPATION TO POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES?

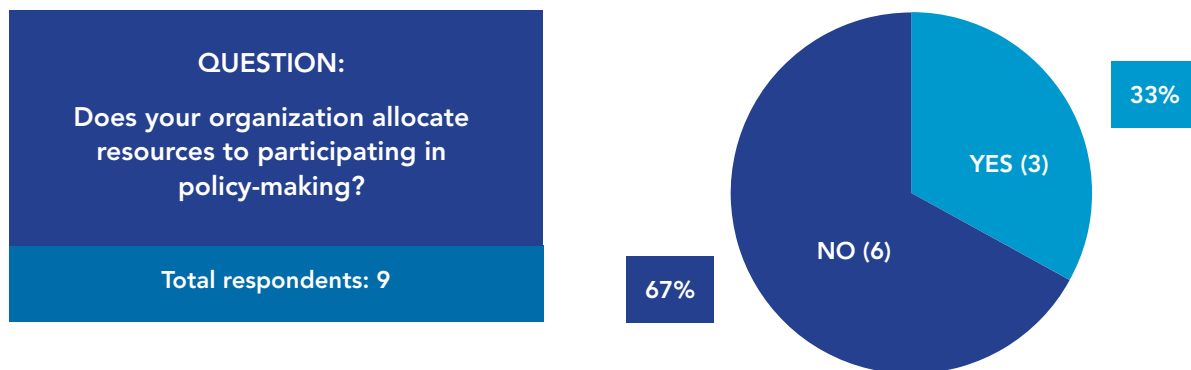
Survey results indicate that NGOs that declared their involvement in policy-making had minimal experience and a wide array of motivations that generate participation. Respondents indicated they typically have little experience with the topic of land degradation, allocate few human and financial resources to the issue, and approach the problem through broader policy concerns such as agricultural productivity and land tenure rights.



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NGO representatives have not been working with government to combat land degradation through policy-making for very long. 40% of survey respondents indicated that they have been working with government officials in this regard for only 1-5 year(s). Additionally, most organizations do not have a large number of staff members that engage government officials about land degradation issues. The majority of NGOs have only 1-5 staff members that actually engage in this issue with officials. Generally, low levels of member engagement correspond with an organization's length of experience with land degradation.

In discussions of land degradation only 33% of organizations indicated that they allocate resources to engaging government officials through participation. The remaining 66% of respondents indicated that their organization did not allocate resources to participating in land degradation policy-making.



In summary, NGOs that engage government about land degradation policies have limited project funds, human resources, and experience allocated to the project.

### WHY DO NGOs PARTICIPATE IN LAND DEGRADATION POLICY-MAKING?

NGOs are concerned with land degradation for a multitude of reasons and the lens through which they approach government officials to act on this issue varies. Representatives provided written explanations of why they participate in policy-making regarding land degradation and the stance their organization takes on this issue. Their written responses have been categorized into themes and summarized below.

---

Most of the organizations approached the issue through a **sustainability** lens, indicating that they think there is work to be done in Uganda regarding future land uses and long term land potential. Respondents discussed how the work they did with particular communities would enable farmers and others who rely on the land to use it sustainably and help to protect future generations.

Another example of motivation to participate in policy-making given by respondents was the **development and wellbeing** of local communities. NGOs framed the issue of land degradation through equity and social justice claims, which is an important component of ensuring community wellbeing. Organizations provided written responses which stated that they participate to ensure greater claims for land tenure regulation and protection against land grabbing, both subjects related to land degradation and sustainable land management. Additionally, some organizations were concerned with the equal treatment of citizens in relation to land access and use.

Other respondents indicated they participated in policy-making because they want to increase **policy effectiveness**. These respondents choose to explain their organization's particular goals for participating in policy-making by commenting on the current weakness of government policy and devotion to the issue. A desire to change ineffective policy-making appeared to be a motivating factor for the participation of respondents in these processes. Other respondents in the survey noted that government policies did exist but implementation was too weak to create change and could be improved.

In conclusion, respondents indicated that land sustainability, community development and wellbeing, and increasing policy effectiveness were reasons that they participated in policy-making related to land degradation.

## HOW DO NGOs PARTICIPATE IN LAND DEGRADATION POLICY-MAKING?

The general finding of this survey indicates that NGOs participate both directly and indirectly in policy-making processes though they tend to rely on strategies for indirect participation, which typically occurs outside formal policy-making events.

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WHICH GROUPS DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION WORK WITH WHEN CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF LAND DEGRADATION POLICY?	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Government offices (D)	10
Community-based organizations (I)	10
NGOs (I)	9
Schools, colleges, universities (I)	6
Researchers (I)	5
News agencies (I)	3

D: Direct mode of participation.      I: Indirect mode of participation.

Total respondents: 10

Working with other actors appeared to be a common strategy used by NGOs to directly and indirectly participate in policy-making. All respondents indicated that they work with government officials and community-based organizations. 9 respondents indicated that they work with other NGOs in this process, and other partnerships were less prominent.

3 respondents indicated that they had formed a partnership with another actor during policy negotiations. Respondents reported in written statements that they had formed partnerships during negotiations with NGOs and community-based organizations at varying levels of policy-making. Examples included the Uganda Land Alliance (national), Participatory Land Use Management (regional), and grassroots community-based organizations. Umbrella organizations appeared to be common partners among respondents and reportedly played a crucial role in their participation in policy-making.

Along with forming partnerships respondents reported engaging in other activities to participate in policy-making related to land degradation. These activities focused on government officials and other actors, like NGOs and community-based organizations. Of all of the activities engaged in by the NGOs, coordinating with other NGOs was the most common. 7 respondents indicated they engaged in this activity. Other activities included lobbying,

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WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES THAT YOU OR YOUR COLLEAGUES PARTICIPATED IN TO PROMOTE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S STANCE ON LAND DEGRADATION?	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Coordinated with other NGOs (I)	7
Lobbied government (D)	5
Hosted seminar (I)	3
Formal statements to government (i.e. during negotiations) (D)	3
Written a newsletter (D, I)	1
Submitted information or draft decisions to negotiations (D)	1

D: Direct mode of participation. I: Indirect mode of participation.

Total respondents: 9

hosting seminars, submitting formal statements to government, writing a newsletter and submitting information to negotiations. The engagement of the public through television and radio talk shows, and social media was a recurring theme of indirect participation throughout the surveys.

Participating directly by submitting formal or written statements to government officials appeared to be less commonly engaged in by respondents. Many respondents reported, in written responses, that they met informally with officials to discuss a specific issue within the realm of land degradation, a form of indirect participation.

PLEASE SELECT EVENTS AT WHICH YOUR ORGANIZATION HAS DISCUSSED LAND DEGRADATION POLICIES WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Coordinated with other NGOs (I)	6
Lobbied government (D)	6
Hosted seminar (I)	4
Formal statements to government (i.e. during negotiations) (D)	3

D: Direct mode of participation. I: Indirect mode of participation.

Total respondents: 9

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Overall, respondents reported discussing land degradation policies with government officials both formally and informally and at a variety of events. A majority of respondents indicated that they have discussed land degradation with government officials during community meetings and conferences, where problem identification or agenda setting stages of policy-making often take place. 6 respondents noted that they interact with government actors during community meetings and conferences, while 3 respondents had discussed such matters with government officials during policy negotiations.

CAN YOU PLEASE INDICATE IF YOU OR A REPRESENTATIVE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION HAS ATTENDED POLICY NEGOTIATIONS FOR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING POLICIES?	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Uganda National Land Policy	4
National Development Plan	4
Local Policy	4
National Agricultural Policy	3
Agricultural Development Strategy Plan	3
Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture	2
Lands, Housing and Urban Development Sector Strategic Plan	2
Regional Policy	0
Other	1

D: Direct mode of participation. I: Indirect mode of participation.

Total respondents: 7

Policy negotiations are examples of arenas where direct participation of NGOs in policy-making can occur. Respondents reported minimal involvement in the negotiations of policies and laws passed at the central level of government. There was generally a higher attendance at local policy negotiations than those held by the central government, as indicated by both tallied and written responses. The majority of discussions around land degradation with government officials seem to occur at large gatherings with multiple actors present.

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PLEASE SELECT THE WAYS THAT YOU OR YOUR REPRESENTATIVES OF YOUR ORGANIZATION PARTICIPATED IN POLICY NEGOTIATIONS:	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Contributed verbal stance on land degradation (D)	6
Contributed written document (D)	5
Spoke informally with government (I)	5
Introduced information that changed the discussion (D)	5
Contributed verbal technical information (D)	4
Contributed information that was included in the final policy document (D)	2
Defined a term or an issue (D)	1

D: Direct mode of participation.      I: Indirect mode of participation.

Total respondents: 7

During policy negotiations NGOs can participate through submitting written documents or vocalizing information. Of the different actions taken to contribute to policy-making, not only during policy negotiations but also during other events, the most frequent was a verbal stance on land degradation. More responses were tallied for the contribution of verbal information to government officials than any other action. The most frequent way this information was communicated was through indirect participation at seminars and discussion groups about an organization, with 62% of 8 respondents indicating this action had occurred. Only one respondent indicated in a written response that their organization had vocalized a statement directly in a policy negotiation. Respondents were more likely to vocalize information and statements during information sessions and at conferences.



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HAVE YOU PROVIDED INFORMATION DIRECTLY TO A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL THROUGH EITHER A MEETING, PHONE CALL, OR OTHER CASUAL INTERACTION?	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Yes	6
No	2

D: Direct mode of participation.      I: Indirect mode of participation.

Total respondents: 9

As indicated above, participation does not only unfold in the formal settings of policy negotiations and government offices but can also take place in local environments like information sessions. 75% of respondents said that they had informally or casually interacted with government officials regarding land degradation policy. One representative noted in a written response that social media is a way in which his/her organization casually interacts with government officials; another indicated that information is shared through casual interactions at meetings and workshops. A respondent stated that calling and visiting the district offices of government officials was one way that their organization participated indirectly in policy-making.

Half of the respondents surveyed had provided knowledge about local conditions to policy-makers. One respondent noted in a written response that his/her organization was currently working with local government to “develop a policy on land degradation”. These responses suggest NGOs participate, speculatively both directly and indirectly, in local policy-making regarding land degradation.

In conclusion, there is evidence of direct and indirect participation in policy-making processes related to land degradation. Respondents seemed to rely on strategies that allowed them to verbally communicate information to government officials, and other actors like NGOs and communities, and use social networks to participate in policy-making.

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## DO NGOs PERCEIVE THEIR PARTICIPATION TO BE INFLUENTIAL OVER LAND DEGRADATION POLICY-MAKING?

7 respondents noted in written responses that policies produced by the government to combat land degradation and promote sustainable land management are in line with their organization's stance on the issue. Some reflexivity appears in this regard, as respondents shared mixed understandings of their role and the extent of their influence in land degradation policy-making. Some respondents noted that they were unsure of whether they had influenced policy-making, citing in written responses that other factors also influenced these processes.

Other respondents suggested in written statements that their work had directly influenced policy and indicated that other governance issues obstructed sustainable land use in Uganda. Respondents in this survey mostly agree the information that they have provided to policy-makers has created some change in government policy. For instance, half of the respondents believed that the information they contributed during policy negotiations was incorporated into the final document.

In conclusion, NGO representatives seem quite aware of barriers to influencing government policy on land degradation, though they believe that this is an important arena in which land degradation can be combatted. Respondents have little experience with land degradation specifically but work closely with other actors directly affected by it. They have informal relationships with government and do have some opportunities to directly participate in the policy process yet seem to rely on indirect strategies to participate.

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING AND REVIEWING STRATEGIES FOR INCREASED PARTICIPATION IN POLICY-MAKING

The general finding of this survey was that NGOs in Uganda seem to have limited direct participation in policy-making processes in relation to land degradation issues, and prefer to rely more on indirect strategies to engage policy-makers and influence policy-making. Common strategies for indirect participation are verbal articulations of information and informal interactions with government officials. Furthermore, working with partners to influence actors directly engaged in policy-making is an important strategy for NGOs.

The major research paper based on this survey speculates that many NGOs rely on indirect strategies because they do not have the capacity to seize direct opportunities to participate in policy-making, for instance, by attending policy negotiations and conferences. Future efforts to increase the involvement of NGOs in policy-making in Uganda could try to provide opportunities that take various forms so NGOs with limited capacity can also engage. NGOs wanting to participate, either directly or indirectly, must strengthen their skills in researching policies and build their organizational capacity to work with other stakeholders when trying to influence policy-making.

NGOs that participated in this survey have demonstrated an awareness of strategies that allow them to best participate with government and other actors to influence policy-making indirectly. Looking ahead, there are many ways to strengthen the strategies used to indirectly influence policy-makers in Uganda and increase direct participation. The following are suggestions for NGOs of potential ways to increase their ability to directly or indirectly participate in policy-making:

- » **Maintaining important contacts** with government, NGOs, and community-based organizations,
  - through partnerships and social networking,
  - through building and maintaining working relationships with government bureaucrats and technocrats;
- » **Building public support** for participation and awareness of land degradation and possible solutions
- » **Raising funds** to self-finance participation activities
- » Increasing the **number of staff** involved in policy-making processes
- » Participating in **capacity building workshops**, for instance that develop lobbying, financing, and researching skills.



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