**Framing Rural Development Governance as a messy and complex process of adaptation: Insights from Uganda**

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**Abstract**

Recent decades have seen a significant shift in development thinking, particularly within emerging economies seeking to improve the quality of life for all their citizens, whether in urban or rural environments. Enabling residents to improve quality of life by making better use of available resources is an important factor in achieving sustainable development.

While much development work has focused on emerging economies generally, there is need to explore how governance structures shape development in a rural Sub-Sharan African environment. We expect that, at a formal level, the interaction of multilateral bodies (UN) and government [national, regional, local] with a variety of stakeholders shapes that development process.

Participation of local communities, development partners and NGOs remains complex but vital for any meaningful initiatives and sustainable impact. Issues around decentralization, particularly delegation of authority, competing agendas and perspectives, and allocation of responsibility for implementation come to the fore.

Perhaps less understood is how, at the local level, informal traditional tribal and social hierarchies and customs influence governance, both in form and function, potentially leading to parallel shadow governance arrangements. This mix of formal and informal governance processes weakens governance structures and allows misappropriation of resources away from legitimate initiatives.

This research focuses on governance in rural areas, where most of the populations in emerging economies live and work. Using case study research methodology, this study examines the factors that contribute to sustainable rural development and impact the quality of life for people living in rural areas in Uganda. The study offers insight into how access to and participation in development efforts can be nurtured and made sustainable through policy changes, strategic planning of initiatives and local community participation.