



Questioning network governance for disaster risk management: Lessons learnt from landslide risk management in Uganda



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ABSTRACT

The international agenda for disaster risk reduction, through the Hyogo Framework for Action and the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction, promotes decentralised platforms as an indispensable strategy to achieve effective and efficient disaster risk management. Based on empirical data from the Rwenzori Mountains region, we question the implications of this type of network governance for disaster risk management. We embed our observations in an analytical framework that combines literature on network governance with insights from politics of disaster, notably scale and blame theories. In this study, we investigate the implications for disaster risk reduction through the analysis of three processes of scale structuration observed in contemporary West Uganda: (i) incomplete decentralisation, (ii) blame dissolution, and (iii) scale jumping. We argue that decentralised platforms in Uganda co-produce unequal risk, as they are used as spatial tactics to centralise power for the ruling party and enable blame dissolution and scale jumping. From our analysis we draw broader conclusions on drivers and implications of the implementation of disaster network governance in countries that are primarily governed hierarchically and that endorse the international frameworks of disaster risk reduction.

1. Introduction

The international disaster governance agenda has been driven by the United Nations International Strategy for disaster risk reduction (UNISDR), first through the disaster decade in the 1990s, then the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) in 2005, and recently the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction (DRR) in 2015. Since the HFA, the international DRR community is increasingly viewing disaster risk management (DRM) as a governance concern (Bamutaze, 2015). More generally, risk governance is defined as ‘the totality of actors, rules, conventions, processes and mechanisms [...] concerned with how relevant risk information is collected, analysed and communicated and how management decisions are taken’ (Renn and Walker, 2008: 4). The UNISDR promotes forms of governance with more horizontal interactions and operating at different scales, like decentralised platforms, as an indispensable strategy to achieve effective and efficient DRM (UNISDR,

2007; UNISDR, 2015).

Decentralisation, on the one hand, is defined ‘as the restructuring of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity’ (UNDP, 2004: 4). This principle means ‘that responsibilities and resources should be decentralised down to the lowest level that can effectively perform necessary tasks’ (Scott and Tarazona, 2011). Platforms, on the other hand, are a generic term for mechanisms to coordinate and guide policy that are multi-sectoral and inter-disciplinary in nature, with public, private and civil society participation (UNISDR, 2009). These decentralised platforms can be seen as an example of network governance, i.e. horizontal governing forms in contrast to hierarchical forms (Damgaard, 2006).

Since most countries are signatories of the HFA and Sendai Framework (168 and 187 respectively), decentralised platforms are increasingly promoted nationally (UNISDR, 2007; UNISDR, 2015). The

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emphasis on decentralised platforms stems from the belief that these structures are a more effective form of disaster governance: they can enhance empowerment and democracy (e.g. Scott and Tarazona, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2005) and match international agendas on sustainable development (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Network governance originated as a reaction to the increasing complexity of the modern state and citizen demands for participation in public affairs as of the 1980s and 1990s (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). Bogason (2006) argues that hierarchical forms of governance - even if they are decentralised - are unable to deal with the complexity associated with globalised modern societies. It is hoped that governance networks thus do better because they can self-organise, innovate, and integrate across sectors of society (Bogason, 2006).

In contrast, social scientists have criticised the growing focus on 'network governance', notably situations in which these governance arrangements lead to undemocratic decision-making (e.g. Bogason, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2005). Bogason (2006) questions network governance's implications regarding equity, accountability and democratic legitimacy, while also acknowledging its potential for promoting deliberation and improving flexibility and responsiveness in service provision. Hysing and Lundberg (2016) argue that governance networks are poorly equipped with institutionalised rules and procedures for openness, transparency and accountability. This deficit represents a key democratic problem (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Bogason, 2006; Pierre, 2009), as proper democratic safeguards against the domination of elite groups and interests are lacking (Khan, 2013; Kjær, 2004) and the ability of citizens to hold decision-makers accountable is limited (Hysing and Lundberg, 2016). These shortcomings are even more likely in societies marked by clientelistic political cultures (e.g. Blackburn, 2014) or incomplete democratic decentralisation (Batterbury and Fernando, 2006; Pacheco, 2004). Summarising, governance networks have simultaneously the potential to enhance participatory and deliberative democratic practices, but they can also contribute to a substantial democratic deficit by dispersing and diluting political responsibility, and obscuring chains of accountability (Swyngedouw, 2005).

The importance of network governance in the international DRR agenda and its critiques call for further evaluations of the disaster platforms and their functioning in a Global South context where vulnerability to disasters is high and overall governance forms are accompanied by authoritarianism. Such an analysis allows to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of the current flagship concepts, as well as the possible pathways for improving their application in practice. While many countries have reported that decentralised platforms for DRM have been established (PreventionWeb, 2012), the question remains whether these have actually improved DRM.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the influence of governance networks on DRM in Uganda. This country is highly prone to natural hazards, follows the international treaties on DRR, and is ruled by a semi-authoritarian regime. We therefore analyse disaster governance from the national to the village politico-administrative level in West Uganda with a focus on landslides, one of the most common and devastating natural hazards in the country. Landslides have specific characteristics affecting and shaping the dynamics of disaster governance. First, landslides are low-intensity, high-frequency hazards, i.e. with repeated occurrences within the same region yet entailing limited societal impacts per event (e.g. Knäpen et al., 2006). Landslides are also often considered inseparable from other natural hazards, such as extreme precipitation, earthquakes and floods (e.g. Jacobs et al., 2016c). Most landslides are relatively local and limited in their intensity, causing idiosyncratic shocks, i.e. affecting a reduced number of households each time (Glade, 2003), as opposed to covariate shocks caused, for example, by floods. In addition, landslides mostly occur in remote mountainous areas, mainly affecting deprived communities living in remote rural areas. Second, there are techniques to (locally) control or manage landslides. In the case of low-intensity, high-frequency events like landslides, strategies for DRR are considered

the most cost-effective alternative to limit the negative impacts of disasters (Mechler et al., 2010). At least to some extent, landslides can be modified by local measures and their occurrence constrained in space and time, and consequently steps can be taken towards risk prevention or avoidance, allowing to go beyond the stages of preparedness and response (e.g. Nadim and Lacasse, 2008; Maes et al., 2017; Vaciago, 2013; Wamsler, 2006). Third, landslide hazards are expected to increase in the near future, given increasing demographic pressure, deforestation, transformations in land use (Kjekstad, 2007) and climate change (Gariano and Guzzetti, 2016). Especially in wet tropical and mid-latitude regions, the intensity and frequency of extreme precipitation events are expected to increase (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014), leading to an growing probability of landslide occurrence (Seneviratne et al., 2012).

The main research question addressed in this paper is: *How do decentralised governance networks influence DRM in Uganda?* Lessons learnt from our case study might be illustrative for the governance of other disasters occurring elsewhere in the world, notably for those countries that endorse the international agenda for DRR but maintain a centralised governance system for overall state matters. This study contributes to the debate on the impact of decentralised network governance on DRM in general, and for SSA, in particular (Scott and Tarazona, 2011). It attends pressing calls for empirical cross-scale disasters analysis (Adger et al., 2005; Baker and Refsgaard, 2007; Bakema et al., 2017) and to a re-politisation of disaster research (Grove, 2013; Pelling and Dill, 2010).

2. Network governance for disaster risk management in perspective

2.1. Limits to network governance literature

Network governance are horizontal forms of governing (Damgaard, 2006), of which decentralised platforms are an example. Research on network governance has flourished in the last two decades (Lewis, 2011). Much of it has started from the observation that new forms of governance have been created to address new governing challenges in societies which have become increasingly fragmented, complex and dynamic (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). Although this research field remains highly fragmented in terms of theories, methods and empirical data (Lewis, 2011), several attempts have been made to settle coherent definitions (e.g. Sørensen and Torfing 2007).

Network governance literature combines political studies (institutions, power and decision-making) with sociological studies (culture, communication, social control and agency) and organisational studies (cognitive frames, learning and resource exchange; Lewis, 2011). Sørensen and Torfing (2007) distinguish two generations of network governance research. The first generation was primarily devoted to establishing governance networks as a new form of governance legitimising a new research field, while the second generation assumes the existence of these networks in contemporary societies. The latter goes further by trying to explain amongst others: their formation, functioning and development; their conditions for failure and success; and their democratic consequences (Lewis, 2011). Despite the importance of network governance in the international DRR agenda and also its critiques regarding its potential undemocratic implications, studies on implications of network governance on DRM remain scarce (Scott and Tarazona, 2011).

Knox et al. (2006) suggest that a multidisciplinary 'third generation' needs to be formed by using different disciplines to further enrich the knowledge on the cultural and discursive practices within network governance. Incorporating scale theory for its focus on vertical interactions (e.g. Blackburn, 2014) and the contribution of politics of disaster to the analysis of power relations (e.g. Pelling and Dill, 2010) provide interesting avenues to better understand network governance. The potential contributions from both disciplines to enrich network

governance literature are elaborated in the following two sections.

2.2. Contributions from scale theory

Scale theory draws attention to the multi-layered and multi-directional interactions between network actors that cause redistributions of power and responsibility (Blackburn, 2014). Therefore, this theory offers a framework to question the ‘taken-for-granted’ status of hierarchical systems within network governance literature (Smith, 2004). Among the various conceptual distinctions in literature on scalar politics (Blackburn, 2014), we choose a constructivist scale approach given its view on social systems, such as network governance, as the produced expression of power relations and inequities within a specific time and space (Purcell, 2003). In other words, this constructivist scale theory treats scale within governance systems as non-inherent, dynamic, socially constructed and political (e.g. Blackburn, 2014). This view thus considers that scalar hierarchies arise through processes of ‘scale structuration’, whereby actors and institutions compete for power and responsibilities (Brenner, 1998). One example of such a process of scale structuration is ‘scale jumping’, which refers to:

‘the ability of certain social groups and organizations to move to higher levels of activity [...] in pursuit of their interests’ (MacKinnon, 2011: 24).

2.3. Contributions from politics of disaster

The politics of disaster have been a research field in geography and other disciplines since the 1970s (Pelling and Dill, 2010). This research analyses the interactions between social and political actors, and framing institutions in preparing for and responding to natural hazards, assuming that disasters are part of unfolding political histories (Pelling and Dill, 2010). Although this research field used to focus on pre-disaster conditions of vulnerability, in recent times it has extended to post-disaster impacts (Pelling and Dill, 2010). Nevertheless, the number of studies employing, in a systematic manner, political economic analyses is still insufficient, due to the underestimation of politics as an analytical tool as well as the politics-averse attitude of many researchers and practitioners in the field of disaster risk reduction (Olson, 2000).

Focusing on the politics of disaster provides an interesting avenue to further understand the dynamics of network governance. Especially political theories on blame (Hood, 2011) are deemed valuable in this case. Political scientists know that blame is central to politics because being blamed for – let’s say - disasters can erode trust in politicians. One possible avenue through which politicians can manage blame from the public is by, so-called agency strategies (Hood, 2002), i.e. institutional arrangements to minimise or avoid blame, for example by delegation of responsibilities. As information on risk and disasters is increasingly more available to the public, the blame-shifting imperative may become even more central to politics (Hood, 2002). An established strategy for politicians to shift blame for judgemental failure is to transfer responsibility to technical experts and judgements (Hood, 2002). As discussed below, the use of platforms is an example of this. The political advantages of this strategy are twofold: it allows holding the technical experts responsible when things go wrong and it ensures a well-informed decision advice (Hood, 2002). As politicians also run the risk that blame is boomeranged back by experts, another strategy is to dissolve this blame (Hood, 2002). One example of such a blame dissolution strategy used by contemporary governments, are multifaceted hierarchical structures (e.g. Dixon, 1994). These mask the intention of blame dissolution by making responsibility ambiguous and governance roles highly complex. While at first sight governance structures might appear to be designed to protect citizens, the focus on avoiding or dissolving blame can have the opposite effect in many cases (Hood, 2011).

2.4. Towards a third generation of network governance literature

The previous two sections illustrated the usefulness of scale theory and political theory for enriching the literature on network governance. By incorporating insights from both disciplines into network governance, we rely on an analytical framework that focuses not solely on investigating who has what type of power, but also how and why this power is (re-) produced.

As this analytical framework combines three different strands of literature, it enables a mapping of networks in terms of both structures and processes. Such an approach is useful for investigating the formation, functioning and reproduction of network governance, as well as its democratic implications (Lewis, 2011). Additionally, a combined focus on vertical and horizontal forms of governance prevents an analysis that falls into the so-called ‘hierarchy trap’, i.e. the focus on vertical forms solely, of which scalar theory is often criticised (Blackburn, 2014). In other words, this analytical framework shows venues to move network governance research towards a ‘third generation’.

3. Case study approach

3.1. The Rwenzori Mountains in West Uganda

The Republic of Uganda, ruled by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) since 1986, can be considered a semi-authoritarian regime (Tripp, 2010). Like in several African countries after the 1990s (Freedom House, 2007), Uganda gradually made a shift from an authoritarian to a semi-authoritarian regime, by for example calling for presidential elections since 1996, which act as a source of legitimacy for the ruler’s party instead of democracy (Ottaway, 2013). Although the early NRM claimed to seek a broad-based form of governance built on national consensus (Tripp, 2010), corruption and clientelism increasingly undermined these politics in order to sustain political control. As also observed in other semi-authoritarian regimes, power is typically concentrated and personalised in the executive branch and enforced by the military apparatus (Tripp, 2010).

Uganda has gone through decentralisation processes since the 1990s. The country is divided into 111 districts and one capital city (UBOS, 2016). The districts are further subdivided into counties, sub-counties, parishes and villages. The legislative framework regulating decentralisation is provided by the Local Government Statute of 1993, which facilitated administrative and financial decentralisation (Saxena et al., 2010). The Local Government Act of 1997 then enabled decentralisation of human resources, and later the version of 2001 empowered elected local governments in Uganda extensively (Bashaasha et al., 2011).

Uganda has one of the highest population growth rates in the world (3.2% in 2014; UBOS, 2016). The country hosts over 40 ethnic groups, some of which overlap with kingdoms (UBOS, 2016). From 2000 onwards, the country experienced high economic growth with some downturn during the 2008/9 global financial crisis (Tripp, 2010). The economy is largely based on the agricultural sector, which employs over 70 percent of the working population (UBOS, 2016).

Uganda is prone to several natural hazards like landslides, floods and droughts due to its geological, geomorphic and climatic conditions (Bamutaze, 2015; CRED, 2015; OPMRU, 2010). The most hazard-prone regions are located in the west and east because of their mountainous configurations along the Great East African Rift Valley (OPMRU, 2010). Landslides are amongst the most common and devastating natural hazards in the country (Fig. 1; Knapen et al., 2006).

Although several districts in the Rwenzori Mountains region in West Uganda suffer from landslides (Jacobs et al., 2016a; Mertens et al., 2016), this region has been largely neglected in national efforts of DRM, showing the deficiencies of Uganda in terms of governance and power relations shaping landslide risk management. We focus on three landslide-prone districts in this region: i.e. Kasese, Bundibugyo and



Fig. 1. Picture of the study area showing a deep-seated landslide that completely devastated houses and crops grown on this hillslope as well as eroded the fertile soil (Bundibugyo district, 25-08-2014).

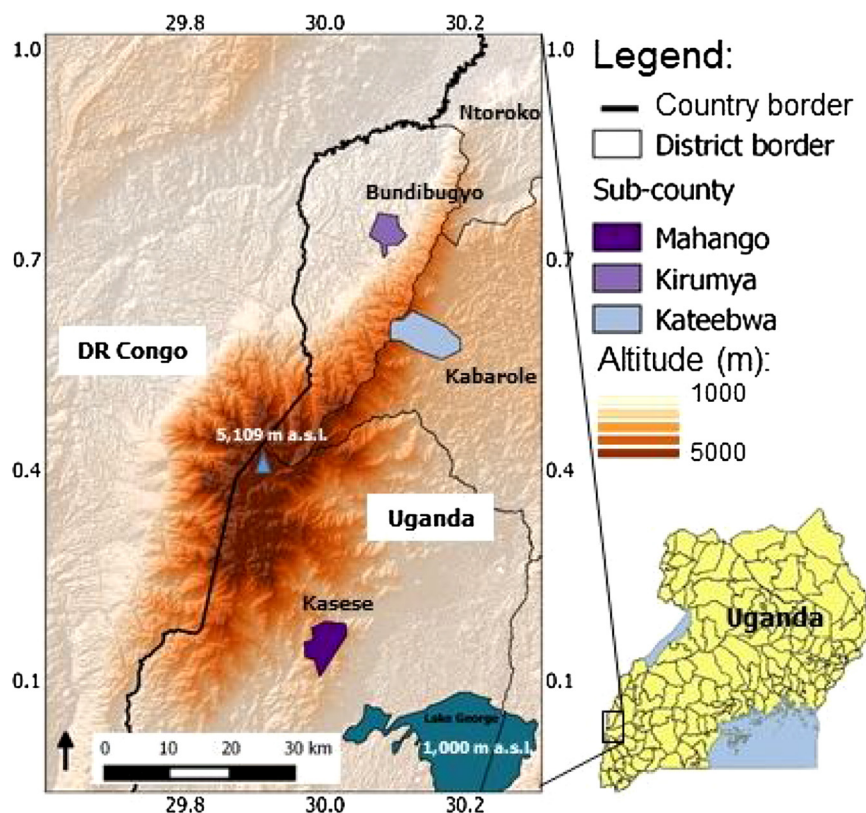


Fig. 2. Location of the three studied sub-counties and the corresponding districts in the Rwenzori Mountains (West Uganda).

Kabarole. Within each of these districts, we selected the sub-county with the highest landslide intensity as suggested by the respective district officials (Fig. 2).

The three districts differ in terms of population density, ethnic composition, economic development, affiliation to the ruling party and landslide occurrence (Table 1). The region is characterised by land scarcity resulting from rapid population growth, private land ownership and large parts of land that have been gazetted as national park (Atukwatse et al., 2012). Different land use types are present: cash crop (e.g. coffee and cocoa) and subsistence farming in the highlands and cattle rearing in the lowlands.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

During three months of field work (summer of 2014), data were collected at three different politico-administrative levels: national, district, and sub-county (Table 2). The chosen levels are the most relevant for DRM, according to the 2010 National Policy on DRM (OPMRU, 2010).

We combined three different methods for data collection: i.e. semi-structured interviews, focus groups and collection of secondary data sources. The most relevant data to study the implications for DRM of disaster network governance come from the focus groups, which were organised at district and sub-county level with key members of the

Table 1

Characteristics of Kasese, Kabarole and Bundibugyo districts (Fig. 2; Shallow landslides refer to mass movements of less than 3 m deep, while deep-seated refer to movements of more than 3 m deep; ¹UBOS, 2016; ²Jacobs et al., 2016b; ³Bamuturaki and Busiinge, 2004; ⁴Electoral Commission, 2016; ⁵Parliament of Uganda, 2015; ⁶District Budget plans, 2014/5: 1 Euro = 3750 UGX, 23-05-2016).

Characteristics	Kasese	Kabarole	Bundibugyo
Population density (#persons/km ²) ¹	205	257	99
Population growth rate (%) ¹	2.4	2.3	2.9
Landslide density (# slides/km ²) ²	Moderate (3.0)	Low (1.7)	High (4.9)
Type of landslides ²	Shallow	Shallow	Shallow and deep-seated
Media coverage on landslides (# news articles on landslides between 2000-2014) ³	22	7	11
Main ethnic groups ⁴	Bakonzo, Basongora, and Banyabindi	Batooro and Bakiga	Bamba, Babwisi, and Bakonzo
Percentage voting for ruling party in 2011 ⁵	41.36%	76.11%	85.59%
Number of Members of Parliament ⁶	4	4	3
Total district budget (billion UGX) ⁷	45.3	24.7	19.8
Percentage of total district budget from donors ⁷	5.7%	4.3%	11%
Percentage of total district budget from local revenues ⁷	5.8%	2.9%	3.0%

Table 2

Data collection methods for the different politico-administrative levels in West Uganda (Fig. 2; DDR = Disaster Risk Reduction; DMC = Disaster Management Committee).

Level	National	District	Sub-county
Location	Kampala	Bundibugyo Kabarole Kasese	Kirumya Kateebwa Mahango
Data collection methods	15 semi-structured interviews secondary data: OPMRU, 2010; UNESCO- UNATCOM, 2014	15 semi-structured interviews 3 focus groups with DMC's secondary data: budget allocations, development plans and disaster reports	9 semi-structured interviews 3 focus groups with DMC's secondary data: budget allocations, development plans and disaster reports

respective decentralised platforms for DRM. Information obtained through focus groups was triangulated with the other methods. Semi-structured interviews were held with key informants involved in DRM. We chose to conduct focus groups because of their acknowledged contribution to policy analysis: stakeholders are enabled to participate in discussions and underlying power relations might be revealed (Kahan, 2001). The validity of the information was checked by transcribing and coding all semi-structured and focus group interviews (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) using NVivo (2012) software.

4. Network governance for disaster risk management as policy and in practice

Uganda introduced decentralised network governance for DRM to endorse the Hyogo and Sendai frameworks. Since 2010, the National Policy for Disaster Preparedness and Management (OPMRU, 2010) was established, along with the creation of the national department for Disaster Preparedness within the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). This 2010 National policy introduced a three-tier structure of network governance at national, district and sub-county level. This policy reflects a paradigm shift from response to DRR. Tall et al. (2013) ranked Uganda among the top nine African countries addressing the HFA goals, yet experience in disaster governance remains limited as compared to global standards. For example, a law to enforce DRM policies is currently lacking (Bamutaze, 2015).

The aforementioned decentralised governance networks, known as disaster management committees (DMC) or platforms, are split into a policy and a technical unit (OPMRU, 2010). According to the 2010 National Policy, the responsibilities of the policy committees are to provide policy direction to the technical committee, link higher and lower administrative scales, identify priorities for disaster preparedness, monitor the implementation of disaster response activities as well as ensure and authorise expenditure for disaster-related activities (OPMRU, 2010). The responsibilities of the technical committees include risk assessment, development of contingency plans, and formulation and enforcement of ordinances on disaster preparedness and

management. The overall purpose of these committees is to enhance horizontal interactions between all actors involved in DRM.

This decentralised network governance for DRM is embedded in the overall governance system of Uganda, which is centralised, militaristic and built on clientelism. Our research reveals that in practice, decentralised platforms for DRM are currently underused and interaction amongst members of these platforms remains very limited. Although the 2010 National Policy dictates that all sub-counties should have a DMC, none of the three studied districts currently has a DMC at sub-county level. According to district and sub-county officials this situation is due to financial and technical limitations. At the district level, we observed that policy and technical committees are combined into one District DMC. Moreover, these committees only meet in case of an emergency and are merely non-functioning. This observation is based on semi-structured interviews with members of these DMC's and is consistent with observations in other regions of Uganda (e.g. Bamutaze, 2015). For example, a district official stated: 'We have the district disaster management committee; [but] it is just there in words' (Personal interview, Interviewee A). Or in the words of a NGO representative of another district DMC: 'The district disaster management committee is by law established; but [...] it does not meet regularly, and yet does not have a plan nor a fund' (Focus group interview, Interviewee B). At the national level, however, interviews and observations suggest that the National Platform for DRM is active and meets about once per month.

5. Processes of scale structuration causing non-functioning network governance

In this section, the drivers for the non-functioning decentralised governance networks are discussed in order to draw lessons for an improved DRM in countries that have centralised governance systems and that endorse the international DRR agenda.

The inadequate functioning of decentralised platforms for DRM in Uganda can be attributed to three processes of scale structuration which prevent decentralised network governance and de facto reinforce centralised hierarchy: incomplete decentralisation, blame dissolution and

scale jumping. These processes of scale structuration can be considered as deliberate ‘spatial tactics’ (Brenner, 1997) through which actors from the national scale (re)produce unequal power relations at their benefit. These processes might reflect a more deep-rooted ideology of, what Tripp (2010) refers to as, ‘centrism’ within the Ugandan national government. Tripp (2010) illustrated that several processes in Uganda reflect the imperatives of a semi-authoritarian state to concentrate power in the centre, on the one hand, and avoid potential opposition or fragmentation of power, on the other. This push for centrism is also observed in other polities throughout the world where paternal or partisan politics often overpowers the local politics (e.g. Blackburn, 2014; Manyena et al., 2013). In the case of SSA, these so-called ‘spatial tactics’ are labelled as ‘extraversion strategies’ (Bayart, 2000).

5.1. Incomplete decentralisation

Incomplete decentralisation is the first process of scale structuration which reinforces centralised power in the hands of the national ruling party. Evidence for incomplete decentralisation in Uganda can be found in the fact that the devolution of financial and technical resources for DRM from national to local governments lags behind on the devolution of its responsibilities (Bamutaze, 2015). A similar pattern is often observed elsewhere (Manyena et al., 2013).

At national scale, DRM represents a small 0.4 percent of the 13.1 trillion UGX (3.5 billion EUR; 23-05-2016) total budget of the National Government of Uganda in 2013, which is a common situation for African countries (Steiner, 2009). At district level, DRM is a cross-sectoral task without a specific budget planned in advance. A district official illustrates this situation with the following metaphor: ‘[W]e just end up being like fire fighters, running to look for fire extinguishers when fire has happened’ (Personal interview, Interviewee C). This metaphor demonstrates the haphazard character of DRM in Uganda. The following statement by an official of another district also points at the lack of planning budget prior to a potential disaster and the cross-sectoral character of DRM: ‘We do not have budget for repairs brought by disasters. [...] for us we address emergencies as they occur, otherwise we do not have funds for disasters.’ (Personal Interview, Interviewee D). Every sector contributes to calamities in case these impacts its respective sector, e.g. when a landslide damages a school building, the education sector bears the responsibility for its reparation. At sub-county level, the budget allocations of the three studied sub-counties also show that no specific funds are allocated to disasters.

A significant gap between decentralisation de facto and de jure thus persists. This deficit is in line with the general decentralisation process in Uganda. Despite the NRM’s push for decentralisation since the 1990s (Bashaasha et al., 2011), the allocation of funds for local governments remains conditional (Saxena et al., 2010) and service delivery by local governments is still not up to standards (World Bank, 2012). As is often the case in countries of the Global South (Banks et al., 2015), the budgets of the Ugandan districts depend on the central government and NGOs (Table 1; Tumushabe et al., 2013). According to Tripp (2010), Uganda’s decentralisation process can be considered as a strategy for the NRM to build a patronage network through setting up local governments that serve the ruling party well during elections. Furthermore, she argues that relations in present-day Uganda are predominantly concerned with producing vertical linkages of patronage and obligation, while minimising horizontal societal connections to ensure that the ruling party remains in power. Decentralised platforms for DRM are in that sense no different. As a result, these platforms are hardly ever used for the aim they are designed for. Consequently, disaster risk information (e.g. hazard maps made by the URCS) is rarely shared by actors involved in DRM despite being relevant for effective DRM, according to several respondents of the focus groups at the district DMC’s.

A news reporter in the study area commented on the decentralised platforms: ‘The structure is there and they [the decentralised platforms] have the responsibility for early warning, sensitisation and more’ (Personal

interview, Interviewee E). As this ‘decentralisation’ is not further supported by a devolution of resources in terms of finances and skills, this process becomes merely a blame shifting mechanism. This blame shifting strategy of delegating responsibility looks appealing for politicians in Uganda, as the government was blamed for inadequately handling disasters in the previous years (e.g. for the 2010 landslides in Bududa district: Jenkins et al., 2013). Blame for judgemental failure is further delegated to technical experts through the use of technical platforms operating over different politico-administrative levels. Fiorina (1982) argues that the reason for such a shift-of-responsibilities is out of fear of politicians to be blamed for not sufficiently planning, in this case for disasters, but also to be kept close enough to take credit in case of a positive outcome. Alternatively stated, delegating responsibilities for DRM is not backed up with financial and technical resources, indicating its mere use for blame shifting. Hood (2002) also argues that experts might have limited incentive to enforce the laws or make right decisions in uncertain situations because they are unlikely to be held accountable in case a disaster occurs.

5.2. Blame dissolution

As politicians run the risk that the blame is boomeranged back by experts, another strategy is to dissolve blame (Hood, 2002). Several respondents indicated during focus groups that they were lost in the complex hierarchical structure that was set up by the 2010 National Policy. Not one respondent of the studied decentralised platforms could show us a digital or handout copy of this policy, despite the claims of OPM members that it was distributed freely to the local governments. In other words, the responsibilities and roles for DRM were considered ambiguous by the participating members, which is a common situation in cases of network governance (Swyngedouw, 2005). While one of the basic responsibilities of the district committees for disaster management is to develop a disaster preparedness plan, two out of the three studied committees did not have such a plan (i.e. Bundibugyo and Kabarole districts). In one case, an attempt for a contingency plan was made but disproved by the OPM as it was a mere copy-paste of the national contingency plan. From the focus groups at district level, we found that household activities were often mentioned as the main cause for landslide loss. Furthermore, most members stated that households should bear the costs of implementing disaster risk reduction measures, not the committees. Furthermore, blame is diverted by the district local governments to the national government as responsibilities for disaster governance are considered part of the OPM mandate.

Last but not least, decision-making processes in these platforms follow a rather informal haphazard structure which is ultimately lacking transparency, as stated in the following quote of an OPM employee: ‘There is no priority on one or the other [hazard]. It is actually cyclic [...] when a certain hazard occurs, there is a focus on that hazard’ (Personal interview, Interviewee F). Decisions made by decentralised platforms thus focus on a post-disaster emergency rather than on pre-disaster risk reduction. The responsibilities and roles of the district are considered to be response-focused or in the words of a district environmental officer ‘...[the disaster management committee] operates as an emergency...’ (Personal interview, Interviewee G). By claiming the main responsibility is post-disaster emergency, they cannot be blamed for not taking pre-disaster actions.

5.3. Scale jumping

A third process of scale structuration is scale jumping, i.e. bypassing of administrative levels, which illustrates the persistence of vertical forms of governance within Uganda. During disasters, affected sub-counties or villages often negotiate and obtain benefits from higher administrative scales through the jumping of scales.

Evidence of scale jumping can be found in the geographical distribution of attention to landslides from the central government. At the

national scale, most attention on landslides, in terms of relief spent and media coverage, cover the Mount Elgon region in East Uganda while the Rwenzori Mountains in West Uganda are largely neglected. This emphasis can partly be explained by the fatal landslides in the Mount Elgon region in 2010 (Jenkins et al., 2013), but also political reasons play a major role. In 2011, for example, 71.2% of the Mount Elgon region voted for the ruling party during the national elections, whereas in Rwenzori 'only' 62.3% - compared to a country average of 68.4% (Vision Group, 2015). Nonetheless, we should note that the high response of the national government to the 2013 flash floods in Kasese district (West Uganda) brings some nuance to this statement.

Within the Rwenzori Mountains, we also observe geographical differences regarding the media coverage on landslides and the amount of relief distributed. At the district level, the media coverage on landslides per district does not reflect the actual spatial distribution of landslide occurrence (Table 1). Susceptibility analysis shows that the highest landslide densities are found in Bundibugyo district which is under-reported in local news articles on landslides (Jacobs et al., 2016a). We argue that, despite the lower density of landslides in Kasese and Kabarole (compared to Bundibugyo) districts, their relative large media coverage on landslides can be attributed to the higher access to national power structures of these districts through scale jumping. On the one hand, sub-counties in Kabarole district have good links with the central government, as many of the war veterans from the Rwenzori region reside in Kabarole district (i.e. linked to the ruling party: Table 1). The particular attention to war veterans somehow explains why response was relatively rapid and plenty after the 2010 landslide in Kateebwa sub-county, compared to disasters in other sub-counties. For example, Kabonero sub-county was not mentioned as a landslide-prone sub-county in Kabarole district by the interviewed district officials despite the fact that recent landslide inventories indicate this sub-county as hotspot for landslides (Jacobs et al., 2017). We observed a similar situation in Bundibugyo district (e.g. Bakonzo sub-county) and Kasese district (e.g. Kisinga sub-county) when comparing the landslide-prone sub-counties identified by district officials in workshops to the results of the landslide inventory and the produced landslide susceptibility map (Jacobs et al., 2017). On the other hand, Kasese district is, from an economic perspective, the most prosperous district of the three, while Bundibugyo district stands the weakest with a strong dependency on NGOs (Table 1). Inhabitants of Kasese district have also good political connections because of its relative large number of national parliament members (Table 1). In addition, Kasese experienced severe flash floods in 2013 (Jacobs et al., 2016c). All these events led to a larger (inter) national attention towards this district and contribute to explain its dynamism in terms of DMC. Besides access to political power, other factors like the degree of urbanisation and accessibility to the road network also play a role in variations of disaster reporting.

In a polity of limited resources and clientelism, scale jumping thus provides certain communities and authorities a more direct access to power and resources to reduce disaster risk and for response. For example, one village leader in Bundibugyo district narrated that she had to make a list of affected people for a Member of Parliament to distribute relief items after the sub-county was hit by several landslides in 2013. She recognised that she falsely added a few extra names of relatives and friends to that list. Some district officials admitted that attention given to certain villages was not in proportion to the level of impact. For example, while both Mutumba and Sibahikwa villages in Kateebwa sub-county were severely hit by landslides in 2013, only Mutumba received relief items. Especially the request for and distribution of relief is highly politicised as often mentioned during focus groups in the three different districts. Given the fact that decision-making and division of roles and responsibilities are less structured in network governance systems, jumping of scales is more common than in hierarchical forms of governance (Swyngedouw, 2005). For example, a district official states: 'Yes, our people are connected! Information can even reach the minister before it reaches here at the district.' (Personal interview,

Interviewee H). This scale jumping has been observed in several sub-counties of West Uganda.

6. Implications of non-functioning network governance for disaster risk management

We argue that installing decentralised platforms without sufficient budget in an overly hierarchical, clientelistic structure of governance, becomes a burden rather than an opportunity. Our research shows that decentralised platforms for DRM in Uganda are used as spatial tactics, through which national scale actors recreate unequal power relations in their favour. This situation reinforces undemocratic implications. More specifically, the loose and complex structure of decentralised platforms enables national and local governments to enhance blame dissolution and thus reduces the ability of citizens to hold them accountable. As only powerful persons are successful in increasing preparedness or attracting relief, scale jumping reinforces clientelistic forms of decision-making which marginalises the already vulnerable groups.

In a semi-authoritarian regime like Uganda, decentralised platforms for DRM may lead to a co-production of unequal risk in several ways. In the case of West Uganda, they contribute to legitimising the power of the ruler's party, to blame shifting and dissolution for the national and local governments, and they enhance scale jumping favouring powerful elites. By marginalising the ones in highest need, vulnerability for those people further increases.

As many countries are both endorsing the Hyogo and Sendai Frameworks and having an overall hierarchical governance structure, implementing network governance for DRM without the proper prerequisites and socio-political conditions is likely to cause unequal disaster risk in these polities.

7. Conclusions

The manuscript discusses the case study of decentralised platforms for DRM in West Uganda and frames the analysis of this case within the debate on network governance. By doing so, we questioned the dominant discourse which portrays network governance as indispensable to achieve effective and efficient disaster risk management (DRM). We observed that decentralised platforms are used as spatial tactics through which national scale actors reproduce unequal power relations at their benefit. This is done through three processes of scale structuration: incomplete de-centralisation, blame dissolution and scale jumping. As a consequence, we have observed that most decentralised platforms for DRM are currently non-functioning in West Uganda. We argue that implementing network governance for DRM in an overall centralised, clientelistic governance environment is unlikely to improve DRM. Even stronger, it might increase unequal risk as it contributes to blame dissolution for the national and local governments, enhances strategies of scale jumping, and ultimately ends by further legitimising the centralised form of governance. We thus argue that decentralised platforms may act as just another socio-political strategy allowing semi-authoritarian regimes to disguise undemocratic practices and keep on concentrating power, a strategy called 'extraversion' in a SSA context.

Decentralised platforms can however also have a 'transformative potential' for societies to enhance participatory and deliberative democratic practices (Pelling, 2011). Yet, as DRM is so marginal in terms of government priorities (e.g. only 0.4% of the total Ugandan National government's budget in 2013), the potential to transform the overall hierarchical form of governance nationally is marginal. Hence, two pathways for recommendations exist to ensure this potential. First, decentralised platforms for DRM should be implemented in association with overall horizontal governance arrangements in the entire country. Second, they should be backed up with the necessary financial, technical and juridical resources and capacities to avoid being used as spatial tactics for legitimising centralised power. Besides assigning clear and transparent roles and responsibilities for DRM, mechanisms to hold

those - who are responsible – accountable, should be established. In order to make decentralised platforms more effective in reducing disaster risk, the following recommendations can be taken into consideration:

- A call for a DRM which is tailored to simultaneously meet the needs of diverse local livelihood realities and address the specific challenges brought by natural hazards. This effort of adaptation and fine-tuning should be sensitive to socio-cultural local histories and specificities, including their interaction with the different types of risks.
- There is a need for a better integration of DRM into other policies, domains and programmes emanating from the different ministries, both in terms of budget allocation and content-wise. For example, DRM could be linked to environmental, development and education policies.
- It is advisable to allocate national and district budget to activities on DRM at various decentralised politico-administrative levels.
- The actual implementation of policies is also necessary at the different politico-administrative levels yet one that brings on board clear targets and evaluation criteria.
- At district level, the efficiency of disaster management committees may improve if risk information (on location, time and damage of disasters) is systematically recorded and shared amongst all platform members. Regular meetings during both post-disaster and quiet periods seem essential to guarantee communication flows building toward enhanced resilience.
- The fact that community preparedness during the pre-hazard phase is crucial reveals the need for capacity building in terms of skills directed to disaster management committees at district and sub-county levels as well as for disaster management actors at village level. For example, capacity building on skills could include hazard and risk assessment, vulnerability and capacity assessment, and training related to the selection and implementation of suitable DRR measures.
- Bottom-up initiatives for landslide risk reduction should be recognised, evaluated and, when proven effective and equitable, promoted and supported structurally.

It is important to recall that our research findings are based on the specific case of landslide governance in Uganda. Landslide hazards have specific characteristics as discussed in the introduction, i.e. mostly occurring in remote areas, low-intensity high-frequency hazards, and likely increasing in terms of disaster losses. These characteristics entail particular implications for disaster governance. First, the remoteness of landslide occurrences and the generally low-impact lead to a relative neglect of landslides by both authorities and the general public (Nadim and Lacasse, 2008). Landslide hazards are usually underreported (Wamsler, 2007) or even missing in global and national disaster databases (e.g. Nadim and Lacasse, 2008; Petley, 2012). Second, the low-intensity, high-frequency nature of this hazard makes it more attractive to focus on DRR and decentralisation instead of response and on centralisation (Mechler et al., 2010). Third, the expected increase in losses from this hazard (Seneviratne et al., 2012) foresees the need for a growing need of capacities, resources and energy in the co-design of governance arrangements that can impede or correct in due time the transformation of hazards into disasters.

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