

The Role of Social Capital in Community-Based Water Resources Management in Kenya's Polycentric Water Resource Governance System

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Abstract : Kenya is a water-stressed country with highly varied socio-ecological environments in its devolved county system, and is currently implementing a polycentric water governance system; this paper examines the importance of social capital in community-based natural resource management and its role in supporting good water governance systems in the Kenya context. Through a robust literature review of theory and case studies, specific aspects of social capital are examined to determine their importance in the implementation of local community-based water management arrangements which support and complement the more formal institutions outlined in the 2002 and 2016 Water Acts of Kenya. Water is an increasingly important and scarce resource not only for Kenya, but for many communities across the globe, and lessons learned in the Kenya context can be useful for other countries and communities faced with similar challenges. Changing climates, increasing populations, and increased per capita consumption of water is contributing to a situation in which the management of water resources will be vital to community resilience. Community-based natural resource management is widely recognized as a building block and component of wider water resource management systems, and when properly conducted can provide a way to enable sustainable use of resources and empower communities. Greater attention to the social and cultural norms and traditional institutions associated with a community's social capital can lead to better results for Kenya's polycentric governance of water. The key findings and recommendations from this research show that in Kenya, traditional institutions need to be understood and integrated into governance systems; social values and cultural norms have a significant impact on the implementation of community-based water management efforts; and social capital is a dynamic concept which influences and is influenced by policies and practices. The community-based water management approach will continue to be a key cornerstone for Kenya's polycentric water governance structure, especially in the more remote arid and semi-arid lands; thus, the successful integration of social capital aspects into planning and implementation will contribute to a strengthened, sustainable, and more equitable national water governance system. Specific observations and recommendations from this study will help practitioners and policymakers to better craft community-based interventions.

Keywords : community-based natural resource management, social capital, traditional institutions, water governance

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