Chapter 10
Kenya Success Story in Water Resources Management: Participatory Capacity Building in Integrated Watershed Management

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ABSTRACT

Management of water resources is at the heart of political discourse to raise awareness among local stakeholders for support in policy formulation and implementation of water sector development plans. The concept of integrated water resources management (IWRM) has been largely disseminated by the Global Water Partnership. Though theoretically appealing and sound, the process of implementation of participatory water resources management still has potential to yield results at local level. One reason is that the top-down approach used is too broad to be implemented and neither does it facilitate better understanding of the needs of each sector involved in the inter-sectoral collaboration to foster planning and benefit sharing of water resources. It is in favour of such practical action for water sector planning and development at small scale catchment level that the concept of “light” IWRM or “Integrated Watershed Management” (IWM) was developed to reduce various threats and severe water constraints affecting local stakeholders.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2719-0.ch010
INTRODUCTION

Water is the elixir of life and a principle indicator of sustainable development (Lal 2015). With the growing global population there are often outcries about the status of major river basins and lakes, which in turn poses serious water provision and availability issues leading to new development challenges. The management of water resources is hence at the heart of implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN 2016). In Sub Sahara Africa most countries could not adequately supply clean water to meet achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on access to water and sanitation by 2015. Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the United States and a renowned polymath of the 18th century was then right to say: “Many people think that water comes from the tap in the same way milk comes from the cow…When the well is dry, we learn the worth of water” (quote from Cyber-nook.com 2011). Savenije et al. (2014) relate this saying to water scarcity in the tropics. “In most climate zones”, they record, “freshwater availability fluctuates with the seasons and is scarce during some months each year. Given the vital nature of water for humans, all societies located in such climate zones developed ways to arrange and secure access to water for domestic and productive uses. Those societies that survived over time found ways to use water in a sustainable manner, or at least allowed the water resource to regenerate itself and did not destroy the natural cycle”.

There are various reasons to the ineffective water policies in Sub Sahara Africa. Some of them include weak institutional frameworks that lead to sectoral and fragmented approaches; inadequate water infrastructural development with competing interests, uses and conflicts; very little or no concern about the transboundary nature of water resources in public policies; and poor and unsustainable management schemes. Since most uses of water resources are interdependent, the problem of coordination of both supply and demand becomes very critical in most countries where the long history of water policy follows a unilateral ministerial sector based approach.

Most analysts and professionals would argue that water management has been sectoral and reductionist for too long, and that there is a need to better coordinate management of different components of the resource (e.g. groundwater and surface water), between various sectors and stakeholders, across links in the water chain (the pathway from drinking water supply to wastewater treatment) and across administrative boundaries. In that sense, Integrated Water (Resource) Management has been widely hailed among those working in water as a welcome aim or vision. Nonetheless, efforts are being made to identify and implement water management solutions through collaboration at national and regional levels to increase self-reliance, reduce conflicts and achieve socio-economic and environmental sustainability for improved livelihoods. Such an integrated approach is very crucial, since water as a resource cannot be served or transported in a vacuum, just like radio or television.
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