

Functionalities and capacities of the decentralized institutions in water resources management in Kenya: the role of water resource users associations (WRUAs)

Functionalities of the decentralized institutions of water resources management particularly the capacities of the newly created institutions to deal with management of water resources at each level is crucial to the success of all water sector reforms and hence water resources management. This paper looks at the outcome of water sector reforms in Kenya with reference to the ability of local level institutions (Water Resource Users Association -WRUAs) to implement their mandates. The responsibilities given to local level institutions is conceptualized in the context of devolution of natural resource management, in this case water. Desk study review, unstructured interviews and a workshop were used to collect data from a sample of WRUAs and key informants. Content and thematic analyses were used in data analysis. Results show that Kenya seem to have adopted a devolution with mixed elements of deconcentration as seen in the establishment of lower level offices like those of regions and sub-regions and also decentralization. The paper argues that while the local level institutions seem to understand the roles and mandates given to them to manage water resources within their areas, the responsibility given to them has not been matched by the tools they have. The WRUAs are required to execute some mandates like contribute to decision making by WRMA in providing permits for abstraction of water, however, what is supposed to inform decisions made for such comments appears to be lacking. There is need to empower WRUAs to be able to handle their mandates and make informed decisions. The study recommends the use of simple water resource management models that communities can easily understand and operate.