



How well are Water Resource User Associations in the Upper Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin (Kenya) functioning?

Kenya's 2002 water reforms

The Kenyan government launched a new Water Act in 2002 to introduce comprehensive and radical legal changes into the country's water sector. The Act recognizes the crucial role the local community can play in managing water resources. If organized in Water Resource User Associations (WRUAs), local people are considered important players in the management of their own water resources. These associations build on voluntary membership rather than institutionalized structures, such as local authorities, with the idea being that, as they are voluntary in nature, they will attract committed members (Mumma 2007).

Objectives of the WRUAs

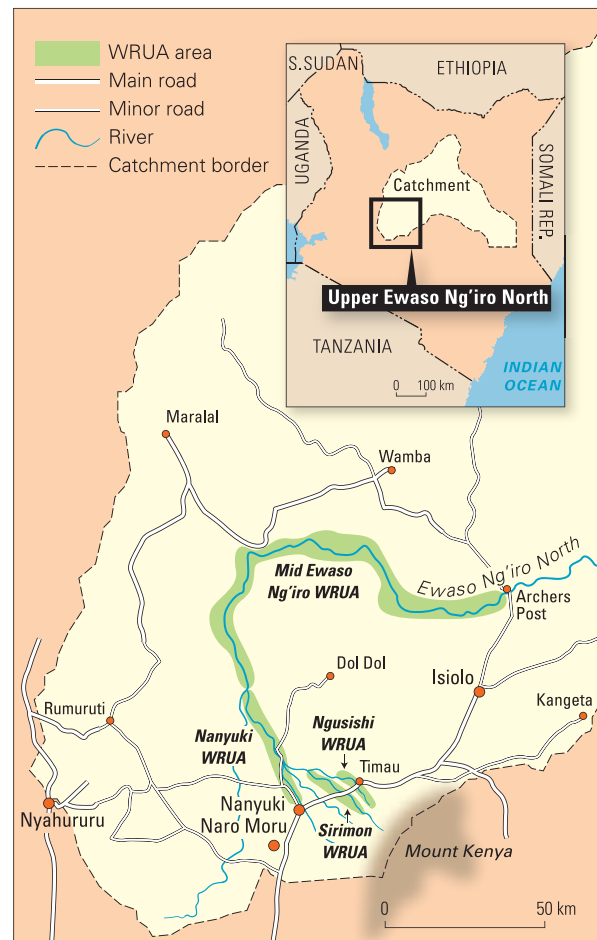
The key objectives of an WRUA are to:

- promote a controlled and legal use of water
- encourage the efficient and sustainable use of water resources
- develop water-conservation practices to ensure sufficient water reserves to meet the demands of the environment, local wildlife, livestock and communities
- work towards reducing and resolving conflicts over the use of water resources
- set up catchment conservation measures

These objectives should be realized by:

- exchanging information and ideas on the use of water resources

- discussing potential projects and developments that could affect water usage with a view to obtaining the consent of other WRUA members and the public
- resolving conflicts
- monitoring water availability and use
- lobbying for resources to improve the availability, reliability, quality or other aspects of local water resources



The Upper Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin [adapted from ILRI 2011]

Water and conflict in the Upper Ewaso Ng'iro North Basin

To the north of Mount Kenya, the Upper Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin is an important source of water for humans, wildlife, agriculture and tourism. The Upper Basin covers an area of 15,200 km², approximately 6% of which is the Ewaso Ng'iro North Drainage Basin. Changes have been seen over the years in the demand for and supply of river water. The basin has faced major changes in the last few decades in its socio-economic situation as a result of rapid population growth due to natural causes and also to immigration, and subsequent changes in land-use patterns (ILRI 2011). These changes have resulted in a society where various stakeholders claim access to local natural resources. Pastoralists, commercial livestock ranches, the tourist industry and small- and large-scale farmers are now competing for increasingly scarce land and water resources (see Figure 1).



Ewaso Ng'iro North River [Photo: Joost Aarts]

Historical analyses of river flow data show declining volumes of water. Although rainfall figures do not show a degrading pattern, the onset of the rains seems to be becoming less predictable and extremes in climate are increasingly pronounced. Fieldwork involved in-depth interviews among

ten WRUAs. A household survey was conducted in the Mid Ewaso Ng'iro, Nanyuki, Ngusishi and Sirimon WRUAs (see map). According to the 150 households interviewed, the greatest problem is the high demand for river water due to a rise in agricultural activities. The likelihood of conflicts over water is going to increase as the demand for it is growing while the limited and already over-stretched supplies remain the same.

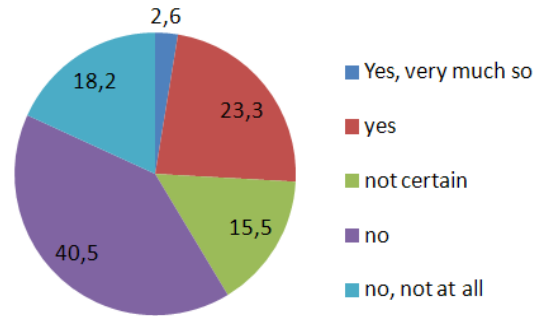


Figure 1: Opinion on the sufficient availability of water for the household's economic activities [survey 2011]

The formation of WRUAs

WRUAs were set up in the Upper Ewaso Ng'iro Basin between 1998 and 2010 and are managed by a management committee of 15 members who represent various groups of water users and the different areas the WRUA covers. A chairman, secretary and treasurer are elected from within the management committee.



Nanyuki WRUA members (Huku water project) [Joost Aarts]

The establishment of these community-based management structures was triggered by an increase in the number of conflicts among users. Outside assistance was often needed to initiate the user groups and was mostly provided by NGOs and large-scale farmers. WRUA activities have centered on water management and conflict prevention. Figure 2 shows opinions of households interviewed concerning conflicts over water use in the area.

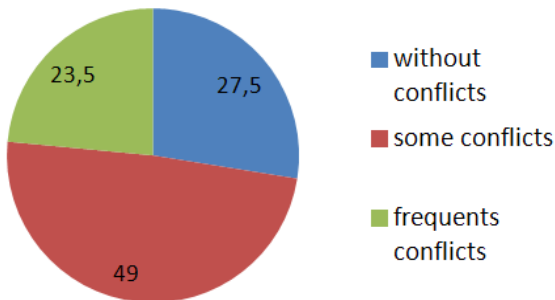


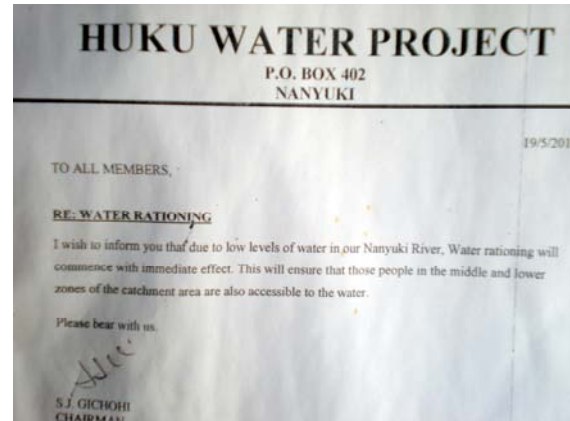
Figure 2: Water use and conflicts [survey 2011]

The functioning and effects of WRUAs

Most of the people interviewed felt that the WRUA manages and controls their water resources well, which generally leads to more water being made available. People pointed out that WRUA meetings to raise awareness are resulting in increased cooperation. WRUAs are therefore positively influencing the availability of water resources in their area.

Officials from the national Water Resource Management Authority (WRMA) stated that WRUAs actively support small-scale household water conservation projects and are promoting the efficient use of water. These two activities strengthen the potential availability of water at household level.

Building on this heightened awareness among local people, NGO employees involved in water provisioning are finding it easier to explain the reasons for the water-management measures being taken. WRUAs can now therefore effectively implement water-rationing schemes in the dry season.



Announcing water rationing [survey 2011]

Fieldwork shows that there are three main reasons why WRUAs are able to solve or at least reduce many water-related conflicts. Firstly, the WRUAs act as forums for conflict resolution as they are an easily accessible platform for discussion when issues between users arise. Secondly, WRUA officials, being themselves members of the local community, are in many cases able to arrange these discussions and solve conflicts through dialogue. And finally, the WRUAs have created awareness among the upstream and downstream members of their interconnectedness within the community. In the case of upstream members, the WRUAs promote efficient water use and water storage and these people realize that their usage patterns directly influence people living downstream. And downstream members are being taught that solutions other

than violence are available at times of water shortages. Instead of becoming involved in physical fights with upstream users, WRUA officials are using their involvement to solve such problems. Overall, the people interviewed indicated that the WRUAs have had a positive influence on water availability and conflict mitigation but they also mentioned that scarcity and conflicts are currently more severe than ten years ago and that they expect a further rise in conflicts.



Training community members [Photo: Joost Aarts]

Challenges

Some challenges do remain. Many of the WRUAs are still lacking sufficient levels of professionalism, both in the field of water management as well as in conflict prevention and resolution. The lack of implementing capacity is most serious. And many WRUAs are in need of additional financial resources. As a result, various WRUAs have not been able to put in place all the measures needed. These challenges could be overcome if the WRUAs got more training and financial support.

The future

The future of the WRUAs would be brighter if some key issues were addressed:

1. WRUAs need to pursue a different capacity-building model. Instead of training a limited

number of committee members for a few days at a time, a different approach should be taken. Community members as well as the committee should be trained, guided and coached over an extended period of time.

2. Most communities will need a full-time professional manager in addition to the management committee to run the WRUA effectively. The combination of local community knowledge and the expertise of a skilled manager will make a WRUA more effective.

The above recommendations call for a devolution of financial means to WRUA level.

References

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Mumma, A. (2007), 'Kenya's new Water Law: An analysis of the implications of Kenya's Water Act 2002 for the rural poor.' In: B. van Koppen, M. Giordano & J. Butterworth, eds, *Community-based water law and water resource management reform in developing countries*. Oxford: CAB International, pp. 158-173.

Publications

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Contact information

On the project: visit the Cocoon-Initiative Kenya website: http://www.iucn.org/wisp/our_projects_in_wisp/cocoon_initiative_kenya/

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