

# A Governance Assessment Framework for Landscape-Level Ecosystem-Based Management

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## The Way Forward for Environmental Management and Coordination in Marsabit

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### *The Challenge*

Prior to the adoption and implementation of a new constitution in Kenya, government institutions struggled in their attempts to facilitate coordination and ecosystem-based management across sectors and across jurisdictions. Now, county governments and various arms of the national government are going through a process of redesigning institutional structures in light of the new constitution. As they do so, it will be important to consider what elements of governance and institutional relationships in the previous system have worked well and what elements have not worked well.

In Marsabit County, this task of designing and redesigning institutions will have profound implications, particularly for management of the Mt. Marsabit ecosystem, an ecosystem of vital importance for tens of thousands of people. Not only is the Marsabit forest an important habitat for wildlife, the mountain is a “water tower”—a source of runoff and groundwater as far away as the Chalbi desert—as well as providing other resources such as firewood and grazing for livestock. Indeed, there is a wide array of interests and values in the Mt. Marsabit landscape ecosystem and its resources. While there have been a few positive signs for management of the ecosystem—efforts aimed at encouraging residents of the mountain to plant trees, for example—on the whole, sustainable management of the Mt. Marsabit ecosystem has faced several challenges, many of them related to coordination, institutional relationships and governance.

Prior to the new constitution, a central plank in the Government of Kenya’s approach to coordination was the use of district-level technical forums such as the District Steering Group and District Environment Committee. As institutional structures are redesigned, one question that arises is whether these kinds of district level forums should simply be renamed County Steering Group, County Environment Committee, and so on? More specifically, the question before stakeholders in Marsabit now is “*What kinds of institutional structures and relationships can best facilitate management of ecosystems and natural resources in*

*a context of diverse, and sometimes conflicting, interests?”*

### *The Governance Assessment*

A framework for assessing governance systems for landscape-level ecosystem-based management has been developed by a team of researchers at the International Livestock Research Institute in Kenya, and Vancouver Island University and the University of Victoria in Canada to help answer these kinds of questions. So far, the framework has been applied to governance arrangements for landscape ecosystems in Canada, Tanzania and Kenya. Our assessment of governance for the Mt. Marsabit ecosystem focused on the system that existed prior to the new constitution and the devolved County system of government coming into effect.

### *Findings of the Assessment*

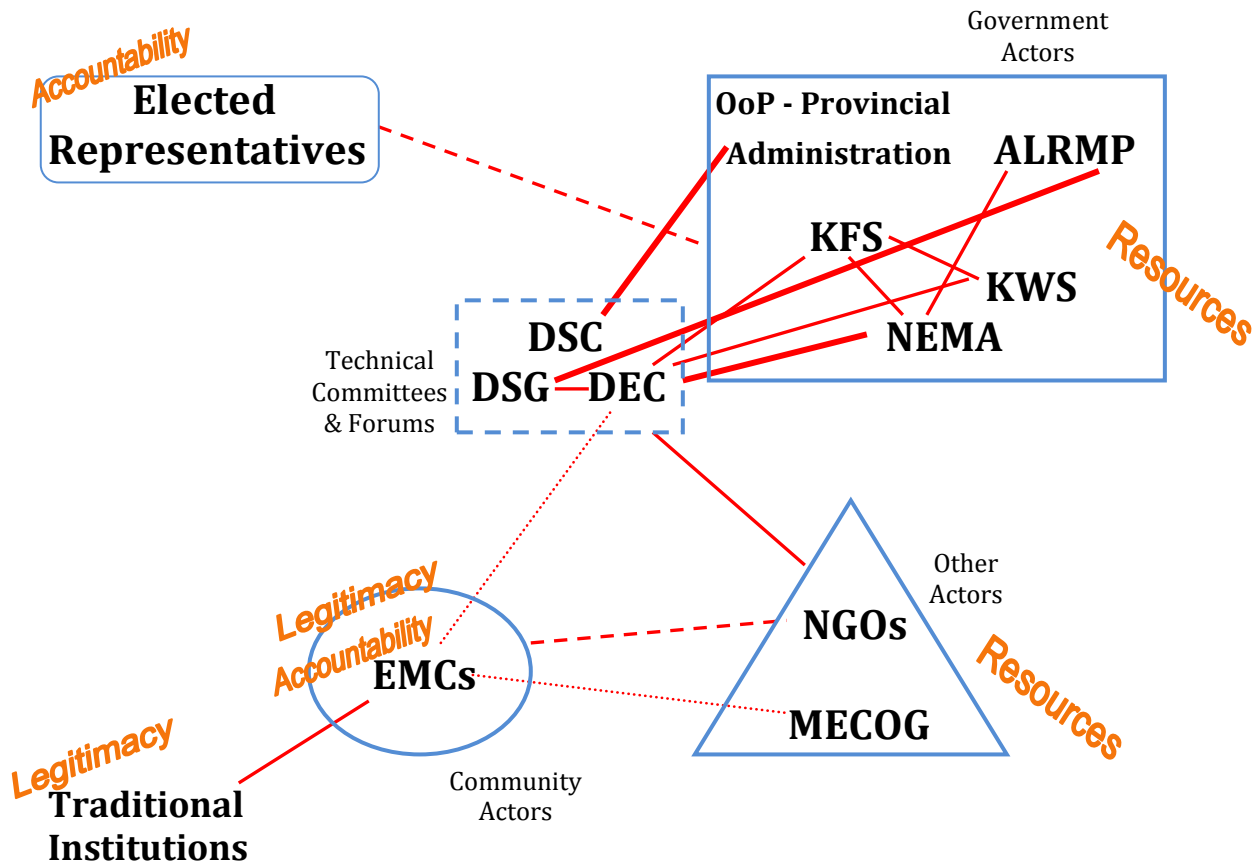
Although there have not been governance mechanisms and procedures consciously designed with the explicit intention to deal with problems and challenges at the level of Mt. Marsabit, the mix of District and national government, traditional, and community governance mechanisms together have constituted what has been, in effect, the governance system for Mt. Marsabit. That system had at its centre what could be called a “technical approach” to coordination based on the kinds of district-level committees mentioned above. This approach had its strengths. For instance, it has been quite effective at sharing information and achieving coordination amongst government departments.

However, the governance system had little in the way of organizations, institutions or forums whose mandate and focus were explicitly at a level corresponding to Mt. Marsabit. As a result, there was somewhat of a governance vacuum at this level. Institutional linkages, while strong amongst government departments through the district-level committees, only very weakly connected other kinds of important actors such as Environmental Management Committees (EMCs), to key decision-making processes. Those parts of the governance system for which legitimacy and accountability were strongest were only weakly connected to the

key coordinating bodies and to the parts of the governance system having the strongest ability to mobilize resources (see Fig. 1). These factors, together with the very prominent place in that system of staff of government departments, combined to create a situation in which the promotion of local leadership, mobilization of resources, and learning within the governance system all suffered.

Community involvement in decision-making at any level higher than Location level was very weak, and as a result there was little of sense of ownership of decisions, plans, regulations, and so on. Social resources in the communities, including the respect and legitimacy accorded to Environmental Management Committees and traditional institutions, were hardly mobilized by the broader governance system.

**Fig. 1: Accountability, Legitimacy, Resources and Institutional Linkages—the Disconnect**



*Note: The parts of the governance system where legitimacy and accountability were strongest—traditional institutions, EMCs, and elected representatives such as Ward Councillors, have not been well connected to the parts with the strongest capacity for generating resources, or to the main bodies responsible for coordination, the District-level committees.*

Moreover, the technical approach to coordination through the district-level committees tended to focus on the sharing of information and coordination of existing activities, rather than planning of new activities. Ultimately, the ability of the governance system to initiate and implement concerted action toward management of the ecosystem was wholly inadequate.

**Recommendations:**

There is a need to strengthen community level connections to key elements of decision-making

and resource allocation. A system in which coordination is driven by government departments makes this very difficult. Therefore, while there may well be a need for some technical coordination committees to continue to exist, for the purposes of landscape-level ecosystem-based management, a different type of structure driven by communities and their elected representatives is needed. Creating an elaborate structure of forums at County level is not likely to be an effective or sustainable way of doing this. An example tried in the past was the Marsabit Natural Resources Forum. This District-level forum lasted only a short time, fizzling

once the NGOs that had been supporting it moved on to other initiatives.

Instead, it is recommended that where a need is identified and accepted by local stakeholders, that such forums being created at some kind of smaller scale such as at the level of Mt. Marsabit, as well as for other landscapes in various parts of the County. This kind of forum should be led not by NGOs or by departments or agencies of the national government, although these groups should certainly be involved. Rather it should be led by either County government, or even, if the capacity is sufficient, by the Environmental Management Committees collectively. In order to avoid unnecessary complexity and duplication, the role of any County level forums or committees should be clear. Some of what District-level forums did or were meant to do under the previous governance system could probably be better performed at a lower level by this kind of landscape ecosystem level forum. In addition, a properly-resourced participatory planning process for Mt. Marsabit may

fill many of the governance gaps that have been identified in this assessment. It could:

- Improve the responsiveness of the governance system,
- Help to bring communities together,
- Involve community members better in decision-making and environmental management,
- Further conceivably mobilize all stakeholders toward much more effective and far-reaching efforts toward environmental management than the previous governance system was able to do.

Such a planning process could bring together and integrate forest management planning by the Kenya Forest Service, the development of a management plan by the Community Forest Association, and also planning by County government for community lands. A “Mt. Marsabit Natural Resources Forum” would have a central coordinating role for this kind of planning process.



Lake Paradise

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### ***Recommendations – Summary***

Marsabit County should support:

1. The formation of a multi-stakeholder forum at the landscape ecosystem level involving but not led by government technical officers.
2. A landscape-ecosystem level planning process that brings together KFS, the CFA, County Council, and other stakeholders.

### About the research

This briefing note is based on the following publication:

Robinson, Lance W. 2013. *Mt. Marsabit, Kenya: An Assessment of the Governance System. Landscape-Level Ecosystem-Based Management Working Paper no. 2.* [online] URL:

<http://www.viu.ca/landscapelevel/>

The research was part of the project, *A Governance Assessment Framework for Landscape-Level Ecosystem-Based Management*, with case studies being conducted in Canada, Kenya, and Tanzania. One of the outcomes of the project will be a tested framework for assessing governance at the landscape ecosystem level, which stakeholders can use to help them make sense of the complex governance environments in which they operate

A Governance Assessment Framework for Landscape-Level Ecosystem-Based Management  
<http://www.viu.ca/landscapelevel/>

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and to plan for possible strategic improvements to governance. The Mt. Marsabit case was led by Lance W. Robinson, a researcher specializing in governance and resilience at the International Livestock Research Institute

### Keywords

Ecosystem-based management, environmental governance, landscape-level management, Mt. Marsabit



Part of Mt. Marsabit from the air

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