



Framework for natural resource governance in dryland landscapes in Kenya: Making ecosystem-based management a reality

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Ecosystem-based management in Kenya

Despite more than two-thirds of Kenya's territory being drylands and millions of Kenyans relying on dryland ecosystems for their livelihoods and the services they provide, effective approaches to natural resource and ecosystem governance in the drylands have proven elusive. Existing systems of planning and decision-making, based on administrative rather than ecosystem boundaries and on distinct divisions of authority among different sectors and different levels of decision-making frustrate efforts at ecosystem-based management.

Mt Marsabit illustrates how patterns of decision-making, coordination and distribution of resources and authority can hinder ecosystem-based management in the drylands. It is an ecosystem of vital importance for thousands of people, including pastoralists and agropastoralists who rely on diverse resources from the mountain. The governance system comprises several governmental, non-governmental and community actors with formal and informal linkages, including: Kenya Forest Service, Kenya Wildlife Service, the Provincial Administration, and

Location-level Environmental Management Committees (EMCs), to name but a few.

On the whole, institutional systems within counties in Kenya have not been designed with ecosystem management in mind, whether in Marsabit or elsewhere. Ecosystems, moreover, cut across Ward, Location, and County boundaries. Devolution as envisaged under the current constitution, with the national and county governments revising old institutional structures, provides a window of opportunity to improve natural resource governance. This brief aims to inform ongoing processes of legal and institutional reform and policy on natural resource governance in the drylands.

Methodology

Case study research, conducted between January and August 2013, assessed what could be called the 'governance system' for Mt Marsabit, including the array of traditional, community-based, and government mechanisms for planning and decision-making and the patterns of coordination and communication among them. It considered how well this governance system serves the needs of ecosystem-based management.

The assessment was carried out as part of the Landscape-Level Ecosystem-Based Management Project.*

Data gathering included semi-structured interviews with key informants, one focus group with pastoralist elders, one workshop and review of management plans and other documents. The analysis was based on the governance assessment framework developed by this project, which includes 8 descriptive questions and 17 evaluative indicators, representing various dimensions of governance.†

Ecosystems and landscapes

Ecosystem—Ecosystems, in this context, include human beings. While wildlife movements, watershed boundaries, and other ecological characteristics should be considered in delineating ecosystems, socio-economic considerations such as livestock movements and the boundaries of traditional institutions should also be taken into account.

Landscape—For our purposes we define a landscape as a cohesive land area defined by common biophysical, cultural and socio-economic characteristics distinct from its neighbours. A landscape may be made up of many ecosystems.

Development of this policy brief drew on case study findings as well as a multi-stakeholder workshop from whose participants included researchers and personnel from several government agencies.

Findings of the Marsabit case study

Livelihood and conservation challenges interlinked at ecosystem level

Parts of Mt Marsabit are designated as a National Reserve and as a Forest Reserve, but wildlife migrations do not stop at the reserve boundaries. The ecosystem extends beyond those boundaries and includes a substantial area of Community Land. There have been a web of movements and relationships—wildlife migration, livestock movement, hydrological flows, and various types of resource harvesting by human beings—that have tied together the reserves with the Community Land, and the forested areas with the non-forested areas. Many of the critical livelihood and conservation challenges are interlinked and can only be properly addressed at the level of the ecosystem. Therefore, although ‘Mt Marsabit’ does not correspond precisely to any particular jurisdiction, the Mt Marsabit ecosystem is a critical level at which to address these challenges. 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, long-term planning for ecosystem management suffered.

* The project involved the International Livestock Research Institute, the University of Victoria and Vancouver Island University in Canada, and the Kenya Forestry Research Institute. It was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the CGIAR Research Program on Dryland Systems.

† Robinson, L.W., Dearden, P., Orozco, A. and Randall, C. 2012. Framework for assessing governance for landscape-level ecosystem-based management—Draft 2.2. [online] URL: <http://www.viu.ca/landscapelevel>.

Sectorial approaches

Natural resource management and development planning in Marsabit, as is the case elsewhere in Kenya, continue to be carried out along sectorial lines. The assessment found that attempts to integrate across sectors were based on what could be called a ‘technical approach’ to coordination using district-level forums such as the District Steering Group and District Environment Committee. However, integration at community level is weaker in that community-based structures such as EMCs and the Community Forest Association (CFA) each operate under different regulations and report to their respective parent organization, even though their mandates and responsibilities overlap greatly.

Community level institutions poorly connected

Moreover, community representation in the district-level forums was minimal. Institutional linkages, while strong amongst government departments through the district-level committees, only very weakly connected other kinds of important actors such as EMCs, to key decision-making processes. The assessment found that 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.

Governance

Distinct from *government*, governance refers to a set of social processes which are carried out by governments but also by a variety of other organizations and actors, and by networks, institutions, norms and values, working individually or in combination. It is concerned with *who* decides and *how* they decide.

Participation does not extend upward

Community involvement in decision-making at any level higher than Location level was very weak, and as a result there was little sense of ownership of decisions, plans and regulations. Yet, some of the community level institutions had important ‘social resources’.

The EMCs, for instance, had very strong connections to traditional institutions, with elders from the institutions being included in EMC membership and the EMCs formalizing traditional resource management rules. However, the respect and legitimacy accorded to EMCs and traditional institutions were hardly mobilized by the broader governance system.

Financial and legal challenges

In the Marsabit case, while the Location level EMCs and the environmental management activities they carry out are generally respected by the local communities, they nevertheless lacked appropriate legal backing. The lack of stable funding for their activities was also a challenge, but recently has been partly addressed through collaborative arrangements with the County Council for collection of levies, 50% of which are kept by the EMCs.

Recommended governance framework for dryland landscapes

Institutional structure

Issue: Most of the existing laws are sectoral focusing on specific mandates, leading to poor harmonization and coordination among stakeholders. In addition, there are weak institutional structures at all levels and poor connections across levels. The ecosystem level in particular is where livelihood and environmental problems come together and where solutions must be found. However, some ecosystems transcend different counties, and conversely there are counties with more than one ecosystem. This adds an additional layer of complexity for governance. As a result there is a mismatch between institutional structures and ecosystems.

Recommendation:

This brief recommends the establishment of a nested institutional structure represented at the ground level, ecosystem level and landscape level, which should be constituted of multiple stakeholders with linkages between the levels. At the ground level focus is on implementation, the ecosystem level focuses on harmonization, planning and implementation, and the landscape level focuses on oversight (see Figure 1). Where an ecosystem is shared by different counties, stakeholders from all relevant counties should be represented.

Organizational capacity

Issue: At the community level, institutional structures for managing natural resources can be very capable in some ways, but this capacity is not tapped. Capacity tends to be weaker at ecosystem and county levels. On the whole, there is inadequate capacity at all levels to implement natural resource management, as well as conflict amongst and between stakeholders, hindering implementation. Capacity is particularly lacking in the realm of accountability systems.

Recommendation:

There is need for enhanced capacity building for stakeholders at all levels combined with continuous organizational development for community-based organizations (CBOs).

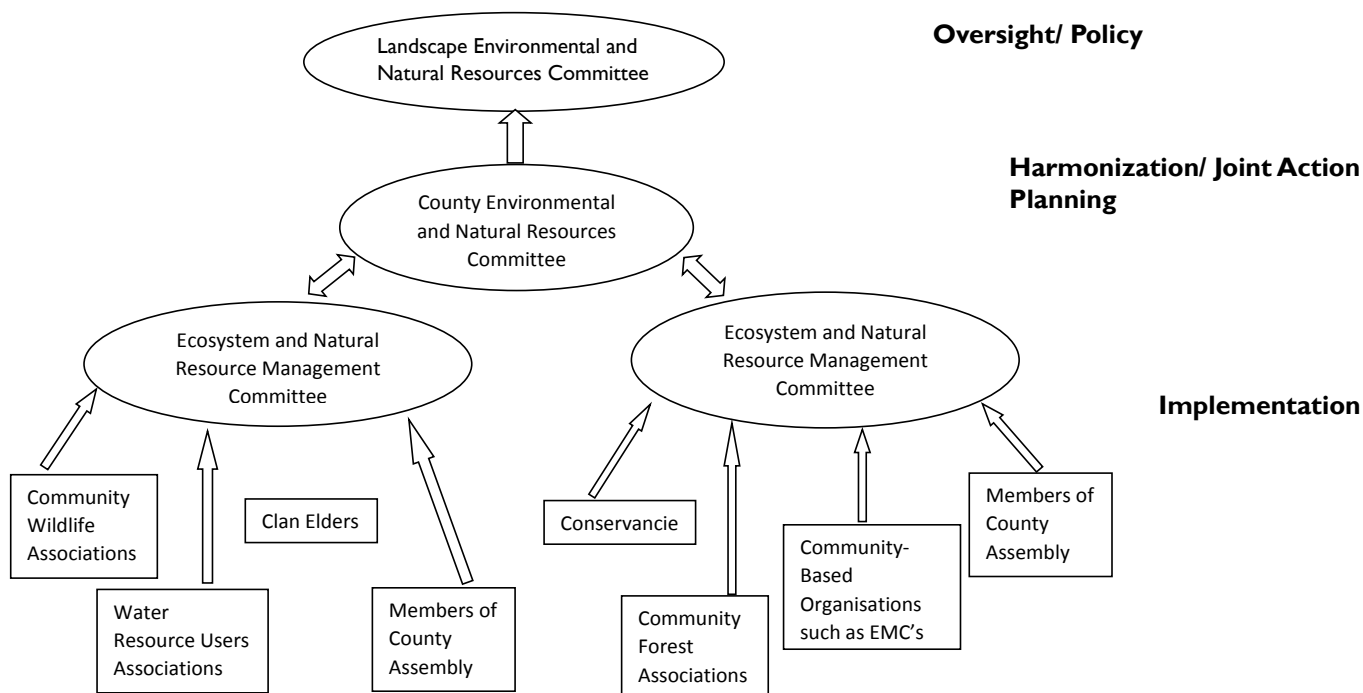
Sociocultural issues

Issue: There is inadequate appreciation of traditional cultures and governance systems, leading to the establishment of institutions that duplicate, compete with and undermine existing structures.

Recommendation:

The nested institutional structure described above should work with existing structures rather than independently of them, and in particular should tap traditional governance systems.

Figure 1. Recommended nested institutional structure.



Financing

Issue: Often, community-based resource management organizations such as CFAs and EMCs are not sufficiently financed to deal with environmental issues. Also, there are inadequate incentives for community members to participate in conservation.

Recommendation:

A framework for financing community-based resource management organizations should be developed at both the national and county government levels. Funding sources should include the establishment of trust funds, and exploration of innovative funding sources such as payments for ecosystem services and authorizing community-based resource management organizations to collect fees on behalf of government agencies. It is also important to explore benefit-sharing mechanisms in natural resource management.

Legal framework

Issue: There are inadequate legislative provisions to support community participation and other social functions at the ecosystem level, coupled with weak enforcement of the existing legal provisions. There are also weak linkages between community-based resource management organizations and county governments.

Recommendation:

This brief recommends the complete review of existing legislation which should provide for establishment of the

ecosystem and natural resource management committees along with implementation strategies at the county level.

Conclusions

The current process of devolution presents an opportunity to improve on systems for management and governance of natural resources in dryland areas in a way that not only builds on what has been working well, but also addresses the weaknesses of sectoral and top-down approaches. By supporting institutional structures that bridge both horizontally across different sectors and vertically across different levels of decision-making, national and county governments can make room for the emergence of integrated ecosystem approaches from the bottom-up and improve community representation in decision-making at higher levels.

Note: The opinions expressed in this brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their parent organizations.

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