Grassroots Participation in Water Governance in Tanzania: The Case of Water User Associations (WUAs) in Kimani Sub-Catchment of the Usangu Plains

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Abstract
For a long period of time, in Tanzania, the management of water resources was through informal traditional system. However, the complexities of the current nature of water resource use tend to overshadow the capacity performance of local informal institutions in managing water resources. There is an inevitable call for redesigning operational structures of the local informal arrangements to achieve good models of management and organizational standards in traditional water uses, enhance rational and efficient water uses, and hence reduce water conflicts. Using a case study of water user associations in Kimani sub-catchment, this paper reveals that water user associations (WUAs) were created so as to modify the traditional systems, in a sense that they are legally recognized, and as such, they have legal supports that ensure their enforceability. In the Kimani sub-catchment, WUAs are the major institutions owning water rights, and therefore responsible for water distribution to their members. They are instrumental in negotiations and dispute resolution between different water users. Despite the good work done by WUAs, this paper reveals that the absence of water rights and good grazing areas for pastoralists, simple penalties to some of the wrongdoers, poor leadership and general management skills of WUAs, as well as lack of conflict management skills of the committees involved in resolving water conflicts, are some of the challenges facing WUAs operations. This paper further proposes some workable recommendations to improve the performance of WUAs in the study area.