

Holistic Natural Resource Management in Kenya, a Solution to our Problems



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Abbreviations: NEMA: National Environmental Management Authority; KFS: Kenya Forest Service; WRMA: Water Resource Management Authority; KWS: Kenya Wildlife Service; WRUAs: Water Resource Users Association

Opinion

Natural resource management is the sustainable use of resources such as land, water, soil, plants and animals in a manner not likely to compromise their future functions for the future generations. Natural resource management issues are inherently complex. They involve the ecological cycles, hydrological cycles, climate, animals, plants and geography, etc. All these are dynamic and inter-related. A change in one of them may have far reaching and/or long-term impacts which may even be irreversible. In addition to the natural systems, natural resource management also has to manage various stakeholders and their interests, policies, politics, geographical boundaries, economic implications and the list goes on. It is a very difficult to satisfy all aspects at the same time.

The national and county governments have really and still facing a major challenge in the management of its natural resources in the country despite the legal framework and relevant authorities such as National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA), Kenya Forest Service (KFS), Water Resource Management Authority (WRMA), and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) being in place. Kenya is also a signatory to almost all of the international laws and conventions advocating for the sustainable conservation and management of biological resources. Despite of all these effort in place, the country has not achieved its objective for a cleaner and sustainable environment for its citizen, 10% forest cover among other environmentally related requirements. Kenyans feel the danger and impacts of mismanagement of natural resources such as extreme weather conditions, poor water quality,

food insecurity, joblessness, loss of biodiversity, land degradation just to mention but a few.

The national government through its relevant parastatal is just missing a point and until this is put into consideration and implemented, Kenya will not attain its objective of a cleaner environment and a sustainable management of natural resources. They have completely ignored the riparian community in conservation and management of resources. The community is the primary stakeholder that holds the key to successful management and conservation. The moment you ignore them then be assured you are going to fail as a manager of the resource. The community must be fully involved in day to day management activities (policy formulation, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) so that they feel they are part and parcel of the management process. They should be allowed to form management committees and association for instance a land use committee whose role is to work out how land resources could be managed sustainably while enhancing people's incomes from their cultivated land. Secondly, the community forestry group is responsible for finding ways for the community to sustain their livelihood and not having to further encroach upon forest areas and harm the environment. Its role is also to promote collective action to regenerate forest resources. Water Resource Users Association (WRUAs) which was formed in parts of central Kenya sometimes back but failed to be implemented in the rest of the country for sustainable utilization of water resources within their areas of jurisdiction. The authority's major function is supervisory, motivational and coordination of the entire process.

Over time with this set up in place, the community will try to shift their production system towards sustainable agriculture practices after they have realized the benefits of sustainable management of resources. The community members will also work together with NGOs in raising awareness about dangers and unsustainability of chemical inputs on to farming land, deforestation, poor farming practices and the promotion of sustainable natural resource management and conservation.

This will be a large shift of practice, considering the scale of poor agricultural practices which put man as the biggest enemy of man as it drives the biodiversity to extinction yet that is its source of livelihood. This will be considered rather successful because it means that the community actually will have awareness about the importance of such practice. In addition, such changes will have brought about better food-security at their household level. A holistic natural resource management a solution to our problems.



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