

CONFLICTS OVER WATER: WHY CONSERVATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT IS KEY FOR NANYUKI WATER RESOURCE USERS ASSOCIATION

Author: Fanuel Nyaboro

Country: Kenya

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CHALLENGE

Source of the Conflict

Water use conflicts have been common in the Ewaso Ng'iro North Catchment Area (ENNCA). The competing uses for water resources in the area has in the past generated conflicts between upstream and downstream users, because heavy abstraction from upstream users meant that the lower stream users did not have access to water at all especially during the dry spells. Livestock owners downstream in search of water, responded by herding their livestock in the higher reaches of the river, damaging crops in farms and degrading the upper catchment. The animosity between these groups would sometimes lead to violent confrontations. What was not evident to these groups was that the *increase in population, destruction of water catchment areas and global warming* were contributing to a *steady decline in per capita water availability* in the region and the country as a whole. Since very little attention had been given to resource management an evident vacuum was created.

Serious efforts to mitigate these conflicts began in 1989 and towards the end of the 1990's communities began to form Associations to coordinate the management of these resources. These associations were formally recognized as Water Resource User Associations (WRUA's) following the enactment of the Water Act in 2002 in which management of water resources was separated from water services. In these reforms it was recognized that: *Fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource; Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach; Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water; and Water has an economic value in all its competing uses.* The Water Resources Management Authority (WRMA) was therefore established under these reforms to: regulate, monitor, assess and allocate the water resources; manage and protect the water catchments; and to collaborate with other institutions as required for better water resource management. The operations of WRMA are carried out through six regional offices set up at river basin level and supported by Catchments Area Advisory Committees (CAACs) and Water Resource Users Associations (WRUAs).

CLIENTS

Nanyuki River Water Users Association (NRWUA) is a legally constituted organization registered with the Kenya Registrar of Societies in 2001 and mandated to manage the water resource in the Nanyuki Sub-catchment in collaboration with the WRMA ENNCA Regional Office. The main objective of the organization is to ensure that all stakeholders have fair and equitable access to the waters of the Nanyuki River especially during the dry seasons when water levels are precariously low. The WRUA is managed by a committee of 14 people drawn from the upper middle and lower zones of the river. The executive team comprising of the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary handle the day to day functions of the WRUA with the support of a River Scout.

At the onset, water users saw the Association as a cartel that had come to deny them water and extort money from them. Owing to these suspicions, any attempt to engage the user groups tended to quickly degenerate into accusations and counter accusations between the various user groups, leading to a breakdown in dialogue. Given this lack of progress, they approached SNV for support. Having an

METHOD / SNV INTERVENTION

unbiased and impartial partner helped allay the suspicions between the user groups.

SNV initially provided a neutral platform on which the various user groups and organisations with diverse roles could come together to discuss their problems openly. Through this session, mistrust and suspicion between user groups were openly aired and dealt with. SNV assisted the initial group to analyse their strategic environment and identify solutions that were within their reach taking into consideration the principles of the reforms and the Water Act 2002. It became apparent to the users that they needed to engage in conservation efforts if they were to continue benefitting from this common resource.

With SNV's advice NRWUA was able to write a new constitution as required by the Water Resource Management Authority (WRMA) which enabled them to legally provide services in accordance with the Water Act 2002. NRWUA was also able to develop a three-year strategic plan and focus on their core business as an organization. SNV also assisted in strengthening organizational structures through training in leadership skills and by defining the roles and responsibilities of their management committee members. The committee members were also empowered on resource mobilization through training and participation in knowledge sharing forums.

Using the knowledge gained, NRWUA sensitised their members on water management and subsequently developed control mechanisms such as rationing time tables, through this collaborative process. The upstream users raised funds for the construction of water intake weirs and installed control valves as control mechanisms.

As a result of these interventions, stakeholder participation and community consultations in water management have greatly improved. Also, stakeholders have overtime developed a sense of ownership and shared vision. Overall, this has led to positive changes in attitudes and practices of key players along the Nanyuki River, regarding water resource management there.

In addition to the water rationing and controlling water use, NRWUA realized that there was need to step up conservation efforts in the catchment. Resource mobilization became a key target for them. Using the knowledge and contacts from SNV, they raised financial resources from UNDP, and subsequently received more funding from the Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF) and the Water Services Trust Fund (WSTF).

With this increase in funding for conservation and resource development, there was need to further strengthen organizational systems and procedures for prudent management and accountability. SNV therefore assisted NRWUA in developing a working procedures manual that details roles and responsibilities of sub committees, financial procedures, procurement procedures, and election procedures. This manual was used in conducting the elections held in August 2009 and the setting up of the various sub committees required under the WSTF funding window, the WRUA Development Cycle (WDC).

OUTCOME

1. *Reduction in water based conflict:* Under the umbrella of the WRUA the water users have a platform to discuss their issues openly in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
2. *Increased involvement of upstream and downstream users* in decision making. In the case of rationing time tables, this collective decision making process has led to greater adherence amongst the users. This is not the case in other WRUA's in ENNCA, where law enforcers have had intervene to use force to effect rationing. This does not happen for the Nanyuki WRUA.

LESSONS LEARNED

3. *Increased awareness and collaboration between users in conservation and resource development:* In this regard, users have:

- Keenly participated in conservation efforts such as tree planting on riparian land
- Rehabilitated water pipes to reduce wastage from leakages
- Adopted drip irrigation systems to increase efficiency
- Constructed pans and installed tanks for rainwater harvesting
- Adopted the practice of washing stands away from the rivers to reduce pollution.



4. *Improved management of the WRUA and water resource:* The management of the Nanyuki WRUA has greatly improved, making them to stand out and be recognised as a credible organisation. The funding they have received and accounted for is an indication of the confidence that different organizations have in the WRUA. The good management is also evidenced in the river flows during the dry spells. Nanyuki River always has some flow for the downstream users.

1. *Awareness creation on the ideals of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) is vital:* When the WRUA started out, suspicions and mistrust was high among the user groups. But with open discussions they have developed a common vision. Dealing with people's perceptions and allaying their fears goes a long way in resolving conflicts.
2. *Offering services before requesting people to pay helps build credibility:* Nanyuki WRUA chose not to levy charges to users over a long period of time as they were still building relationships and raising the awareness on the need for conservation. By offering services first they have demonstrated that they are credible and can be trusted, to deliver quality.