The Role of Women in Water Management and Conflict Resolution in Marsabit, Kenya

A joint collaboration of Emory University, Millennium Water Program Kenya, and Food for the Hungry Kenya

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Marsabit, Kenya

Major Ethnic Groups: Gabbra, Rendille, Boran, Samburu

Livelihood: 80% Pastoralism

Water Sources: Boreholes, seasonal dams and pans, springs

http://www.northernkenyafund.org/?page=home
Water Points in Marsabit
Background

• Access to domestic water supplies

• Sharing scarce water resources → Competition and potential for conflict

• Community Resource Management

• Providing domestic water as a female task
Objective:

- What are the types and nature of water-related conflicts in Marsabit, how do they impact women, and what role do women play in water management and conflict resolution?

Study Questions:

1. What are the main sources of water conflict?
2. What are the effects of water conflicts on women’s access to water?
3. What efforts have been made to address water conflict and how successful have they been?
4. What roles do women play in water management and conflict resolution?
Methods: Site Selection

Three Main Sites:
• Loglogo (Samburu & Rendille)
• Walda (Borana)
• Turbi (Gabra)

Considerations for Site Selection:
• Sites where FH Kenya is currently working
• Representative of conflict both between and within communities
Methods: Data Collection & Analysis

• **Key Informant Interviews (N=10)**
  Representatives at each site, FH Kenya, and other organizations at the district and national level.

• **Focus Group Discussions (N=16)**
  Loglogo: Women: 3  Men: 3  
  Walda: Women: 3  Men: 3  
  Turbi: Women: 2  Men: 2

• **Observation**
  Conducted at the main water points for each research site.
Results

Interactions occurred between:
1. Male livestock users
2. Female domestic users
3. Male livestock users and female domestic users.
Women and Formal Water Management

• Unique Contributions of women:
  • Specialized knowledge
  • Resource Utilization
  • Joint decision making

• Challenges:
  • Attendance
  • Participation
  • Gender Norms
  • Communication channels

• Forum for contributions
Results

1. What are the main sources of water conflict?

1.1 conflicts among the male livestock users:

- Competition for priority access to the troughs, bribing the management committee, and misunderstandings of water sharing agreements between communities were key factors that led to conflict among livestock users.

1.2. conflicts among the female domestic users

- Competition for priority access to the domestic tap, bribery, and favoritism led to conflict among individual women.

1.3. conflicts between male livestock users and female domestic users.

- Prioritization of filling livestock troughs over domestic tanks was the main cause of conflict between domestic and livestock users. Conflicts occurred between livestock and domestic users as distinct user groups and as individuals. Participants explained that filling livestock troughs is often prioritized over supplying the domestic taps at boreholes.
Results

2. What are the effects of water conflicts on women’s access to water?

- Conflicts between domestic and livestock users often limit women’s ability to access sufficient domestic water supplies. Water management committees prioritized livestock and women had to wait for livestock to finish taking water before collecting domestic water.

3. What efforts have been made to address water conflict and how successful have they been?

- Statutory water management committees and customary leaders, such as elders, were involved in preventing and mitigating conflicts. The mandate of each body in addressing water conflicts is not clear. One overarching theme in this study was the importance of customary mechanisms of natural resource management and conflict resolution and the challenges of these mechanisms operating in parallel to statutory ones.
Results

4. What roles do women play in water management and conflict resolution?

Men and women perceived women to have unique knowledge that would improve water management, specifically access to water for domestic use. However, cultural norms prevented women from active participation in decision-making within the current structure of formal water management committees. Women were involved in informal water management through initiatives such as large rainwater collection systems, which increased access to domestic water.
5. What are the effects of water conflicts on women’s access to water?

- Conflicts between domestic and livestock users often limit women’s ability to access sufficient domestic water supplies. Water management committees prioritized livestock and women had to wait for livestock to finish taking water before collecting domestic water.
Women and Informal Management

- Loglogo
  - Tank Installation

- Turbi
  - Domestic pan
  - Rock catchment
Conclusions

• Management is linked to conflict mitigation
• Current management schemes could be improved by incorporating components of customary management approaches
• Incorporating women would improve water management and reduce conflict between domestic and livestock users.
• Women have little decision making power on water management committees in this cultural context
• Women’s initiatives to separate domestic water collection from livestock collection points reduced the potential for water conflicts and were culturally appropriate
• Evidence from this project can be used to promote culturally appropriate ways to involve women in water management that reduce conflicts and increase access to domestic water supplies
Program Implications

• Community sensitization with men and women on empowering women to be involved in management.

• Support Women’s Groups and initiatives related to water access

• Incorporate traditional laws into governance strategies

• Separation of domestic and livestock water sources
Discussion Points

• Effectiveness of community management committees in this context?
• How can specific cultural contexts be incorporated?
• Embedding traditional management mechanisms into community based management approaches
  • Participation vs. deliberation?
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References


