



The role of Water Resources Users Associations in hydrological research: experiences from Lake Naivasha Basin, Kenya

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This paper is based on recent studies in Lake Naivasha Basin that explored the ways in which locally based institutions namely the Water Resources Users Associations (WRUAs) are contributing to hydrological knowledge for decision-making processes. Lake Naivasha is a shallow freshwater body which is situated on the floor of Kenya's Rift Valley. It covers approximately 140 Km² and supports a rich diversity of plants and animals. The Lake Naivasha Basin faces several challenges associated with over- population, urbanization and intensive agricultural activities. For example, the large-scale floricultural and horticultural export industries around the Lake have attracted thousands of migrants from different parts of Kenya who have settled around the Lake and exert a lot of pressure on its resources.

The Lake Naivasha is one of the best examples in Kenya where the WRUAs development process has shown some progress. There are 12 WRUAs across the Lake Basin representing its various sub-catchments. In recent years, the role of WRUAs in the Lake has changed rapidly as they are no longer restricted to just resolving conflicts and fostering cooperation between water users. They now have an additional responsibility of collecting hydrological data within their respective sub-catchments. The majority of WRUA officials have been trained on how to collect data such as reading rain gauges, measuring stream flows, turbidity and sediment loads. The data collected are sent to the relevant government authorities for validation and interpretation and the information derived from this process is used to formulate important strategies such as water allocation plans.

Using secondary data analysis, interviews and focus group discussions the study investigated how this new role of the WRUAs is changing the water resource management landscape in the Lake Naivasha Basin. In particular it presents key challenges and opportunities associated with attempts to build capacities of lower level institutions like the WRUAs to take a more active role in participating in evidence based research. Some interesting issues have emerged including data validation, credibility and authenticity of the information generated as well as intellectual property rights.