

Involving Local Communities in Geothermal Development – Opportunities and Challenges – A case from Geopower Africa

Nicholas Mariita

Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, GeTRI, Geothermal, Nyeri, Kenya (nicholas.mariita@dkut.ac.ke)

Geothermal energy use is fast growing in East Africa and, in particular, Kenya as a source of electricity for the grid (serving essentially urban areas). Major projects are planned by the government to increase electrical power from geothermal from the present 600 or so MWe to over 3,000 MWe in less than 2 decades. The present approaches of large-sized (of over 50 MWe each) renewable energy projects, risk becoming unsustainable due to the fact that they neglect the interests of local communities. It is therefore important to solve the present paradox that the people traditionally living in the East African rift valley – essentially pastoral communities – would be left out of the ongoing developmental activities if no measures involving them are put in place to address their basic needs. The recently completed Geopower Africa research project has found out that, invariably, communities around the low enthalpy geothermal sites visited are willing and ready to cooperate in the development of their resources. They have great desire for change through implementation of small scale geothermal projects as evidenced from feedback community meetings held. They cited benefits that would accrue from provision of power and water and improved mobile telephone communication. Hence, for sustainability of small scale geothermal projects, the local communities living on the present or future areas of geothermal development would become really actors in promoting uses and answering their needs and development capabilities. This paper proposes ways in which communities around geothermal sites can become active stakeholders in the development of their local resources. We highlight opportunities and challenges in these efforts.