

## **Water Resources Users Associations as Triggers for Knowledge-based Basin Management in Kenya**

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### ***Abstract***

Kenya is largely a water deficit country. Most catchments in the country are therefore characterised by a serious problem of water scarcity with the associated competition and conflicts among the different user groups.

The Ewaso Ngiro North river basin exhibits the most typical characteristics of this problem owing to the unprecedented land ownership and land use transformation the region has experienced in the last almost five decades. The main outcome of this transformation process has been rapid population growth; accelerated land cover change and insurmountable pressure on natural resources, especially water. The water problem in the basin has reached critical levels, and different approaches have been used to address the worsening situation.

This paper discusses the key aspects of ecological and socioeconomic changes leading to the current water crisis in the basin, and looks at the Water Resources Users Associations (WRUAs) as one of the approaches taken to address the situation. Because they are rooted in the concerned communities, the WRUAs have become an effective strategy to solve the water problem, especially in resolving the user conflicts in the basin; for example, the WRUAs helped solve 48 out of the identified 52 conflicts in the basin between 1997 and 2003. Additionally, a strong civil society has emerged, through the WRUAs, and their agenda broadened beyond conflicts resolution thereby making them one of the most effective platform for social learning and action. Further more, the WUAs were recently recognised by law as grassroots institutions for water resources management in the country.

Therefore, despite a number of challenges that continue to affect the formation and functioning of WRUAs, with this legislative recognition and promised government facilitation, it can be assumed that their role as grassroots institutions to promote knowledge based basin management will become more realisable.