

Ensuring Integrated Water Resource Management in Tanzania Benefits All

The introduction of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) in the early 1990s by international donors has led to some important new knowledge about availability and uses of water resources in Tanzania. However, more needs to be done to recognise the priorities of the rural majority of small-scale users, and not just those of donors, the environmental lobby and foreign investors in land and water. Greater efforts also need to be made by the basin offices to regulate high-impact users, and to work with existing district and local government structures that have developed and managed water to serve the rural majority since independence, rather than create additional top-down parallel institutional layers.

Introduction of IWRM in Tanzania

On the waves of Tanzania's structural adjustment and economic liberalisation, the World Bank, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) introduced IWRM in the early 1990s. These and other international organisations formulated the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development in the same era, setting the stage for IWRM as the hegemonic water policy across the globe for decades to come. A revision of the national water policy and water law was a condition of the World Bank's loan. The government swiftly added the 'D' of 'Development' to IWRM&D to better reflect its main concern of developing water storage and infrastructure for growing rural and urban, hydropower, mining and industrial needs. The subsequent National Water Policy (2002) and Water Resources Management Act (2009) set out the IWRM approach envisaged for all nine basins demarcated in 1981. In the three basins where IWRM has been implemented, the pattern is the same. A basin office is opened. Basin studies and management plans are compiled. The basin office starts implementing the new permit-based taxation system to generate the revenue for the basin office's functioning. The office reaches out to 'all water users' through the top-down establishment of catchment and sub-catchment councils and Water User Associations (WUAs) for small-scale users. This approach entails three challenges and setbacks for the rural majority of small-scale users.

1. Basin studies

Externally financed basin studies generated unique weather, hydrological and water use information vital to government for the planning of potential infrastructure investments in the full range of growing water needs across the population. Yet questions were raised around the use of this information, even for the comprehensive and in-depth study by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on the Wami/Ruvu basin. There were also concerns about whether the basin studies reflected the government's priorities or those of international financiers. In the Pangani basin, NORAD prioritised the downstream hydropower plant they constructed. In the same basin the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) prioritised environmental concerns. In the Rufiji basin, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) promoted nature conservation. Rufiji basin studies informed the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania initiative and enabled the USA to demarcate 22,000 hectares of prime agricultural land and related water sources for its estates, for which the Irrigation Division of the Department of Agriculture now designs the irrigation supplies.

2. Misuse of permits

The German/British colonial water law imposed one legal system, permits ('water rights' at the time), which cancelled customary water law. After independence, the government only obliged large-scale investors and public water schemes to apply for a permit. Under IWRM, the World Bank both transformed permits into taxation tools and

imposed nationwide implementation. An analysis of the data from the Wami/Ruvu basin office shows that the 30 largest registered users use 89 per cent of the volumes allocated, and the 930 other users access just 11 per cent. With such inequalities in water use, efforts to tax small-scale users are disproportionate, often leading to a net loss of revenue. Even less human and financial resources are left to regulate the 30 large-scale, often powerful users. To mitigate collection costs, basin offices seek to organise small-scale

users into WUAs, mistakenly assuming that the mere purpose of revenue collection is sufficient ground for viable organisation.

3. Additional layers of governance

The intended creation of a new governance layer of catchment councils and WUAs formally sidelines rural district and local government structures which since independence have had the formal mandate to develop and manage water, as well as land, roads, energy and other relevant factors for water.

Policy recommendations

The following recommendations outline ways in which the benefits of IWURM could be more equally distributed:

At national level

- Focus consistently on 'development' and developing Tanzania's abundant water resources for all its needs, not just those of international organisations or investors, and acknowledge that 'water management' is part and parcel of 'water development'.
- Demystify the depoliticised priorities set by international organisations under a quasi-scientific 'IWURM' banner which seeks to curtail small-scale irrigation.
- Articulate guiding principles on how high-impact users, especially big investors, should avoid disproportionate overuse and pollution; ensure benefits of water are shared across the population and assist in operationalising those guiding principles into the conditions of water use and waste discharge permits.
- Recognise the water development and management mandate of local government authorities since independence.

At basin level

- Ensure that basin studies address the needs of line agencies, local government authorities and user associations, and that there is open access to findings.
- Prioritise regulation of high-impact users through permits.
- Empower local government authorities to report, monitor and enforce permit conditions for these high-impact users.
- Stop organising water users primarily for the sake of revenue collection.
- Revise permit-based taxation of small-scale users by ensuring that collection costs are less than revenue generated; that exemptions in general national taxation policies are reflected in water taxation; and that public financial support to small-scale users is harmonised with imposing financial obligations on the same people.

At district level

- Harness lessons from local government's water development and management and conflict resolution for the range of water needs, including its support to widespread traditional irrigation.
- Facilitate conflict resolution and protection against big investors through one or more District Development Councils, aligned with land negotiations and upstream-downstream issues at stake.

Further reading

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Credits

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