NETWORK STRENGTHENING FOR POLICY INFLUENCING: A CASE STUDY OF HOW NEWLY FORMED CSO'S NETWORKS IN THARAKA NITHI, NYERI AND MERU COUNTIES ADOPTS AND ADVOCATES FOR ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION INNITIATIVES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTIES

Introduction

As researchers provide compelling evidence pointing to climate change, governments and civil society actors are getting stimulated to act and reverse the negative impacts of extreme climate change. The impact of climate change on Kenya is profound and staggering. It is estimated that Kenya's landmass is 582,350 km2, of which only 17% is arable, with 83% consisting of semi-arid and arid land. Climate change and human activities are resulting in desertification and increasing total semi-arid and arid land. Development partners and civil society actors working on climate change have played a critical role complementing government policy actions. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are participating in agenda setting, and increasing awareness that promote climate change adaptation through civic engagement. Civic engagement serves as an important tool for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to promote a more effective response to the hazardous effects of extreme climate change. Despite this, researchers and policy analyst argue that civil societies work within the environmental sector is not based on rigorous research, their actions are uncoordinated, and outcomes are poorly communicated.

Over the last couple of decades, civil society organizations (CSOs) and networks have made Contributions in transforming lives and making a difference in international development and are considered development actors in their own right. A civil society organization refers to —any organization that works in the arena between the household, the private sector, and the state, to negotiate matters of public concern Examples of CSOs include a variety of institutions operating at the global, regional, national and local levels such as NGOs, community groups, research institutes, think tanks, advocacy groups, trade unions, academic institutions, and parts of the media, professional associations, and faith-based institutions Among the main functions of CSOs in development include: representation (organizations that aggregate citizen voice), advocacy (organizations that lobby on particular issues), technical inputs (organizations that provide information and advice), capacity building (organizations that provide support to other CSOs, including funding), service delivery (organizations that implement development projects or provide services) and social functions (organizations that foster collective recreational activities) CSOs —provide humanitarian relief and basic services, innovate in service delivery, build capacity and advocate with and for the poor.

CSOs help in preparing citizens by creating awareness and educating people to understand issues under discussion. They achieve this by fostering individuals and knowledge, which can eventually create policy windows for communities to engage their decision makers, with the capacity to pinpoint and articulate development problems in the future.

Background Information,

GRADIF KENYA AND DETRA AFRICA been able to bring together all the CSO'S in environment sector, to work on common purpose of spearheading the mandate of rights to environment protection in the last 2 years. The Network has so far been formally registered in Meru, Nyeri and Tharaka Nithi County.

Before DETRA-AFRICA AND GRADIF KENYA facilitated in formation of networks, there was no evident network of CSO's successfully working together in efforts of spearheading promoting and advocating for conservation initiatives. This study looks at an in-depth analysis of the steps taken by DETRA AFRICA and GRADIF KENYA in formation of a strong network of CSO'S in Tharaka Nithi County, progress made, challenges and recommendations.

The study was conducted for 2 days by DETRA AFRICA staff with the following objectives

- To ascertain the knowledge the knowledge acquired by the network member CSO's from the trainings facilitated in terms of climate change and advocacy
- To verify how the CSO's have replicated the knowledge acquired in the 2 years of implementation.
- To ascertain key challenges and gaps faced by the CSO networks and individual CSO's during the 2 years and future plans to address them.

The data collection was based on in-depth interview by randomly selected respondents selected from different CSO's in Tharaka Nithi, Meru and Nyeri Counties.

Findings

Tharaka Nithi environment network (THAREN) is a newly formed network of CSO's in the County of Tharaka Nithi. The network has a good leadership where the officials were elected by the network members through secret ballot. Through the trainings done, the members have so far demonstrated knowledge and awareness on environment and climate change issues. This was evidenced by various initiatives they have been able to undertake like environment awareness campaigns in their communities. The network members have also managed to mobilize funds to make tree nurseries where they have in the dry part of the County planted "Muringa Olifera" tree which is believed to have medicinal and nutritional value. When mature, the leaves are crushed and put in tea. They have been able to educate people in Tharaka to plant the tree to also act as re afforestation strategy due to its multiple benefits.

The network has also started promoting re afforestation in public primary and secondary schools; so far, they have managed to plant trees in 2 public primary schools. They have also identified farmer's hot spots where farmers can donate pieces of land for planting trees. So far, trees have been planted in 22 families in Tharaka south and Tharaka North.

The group has also engaged the County leadership in various instances by working closely with the County drought management authority (CDMA). The networks has also become a key stakeholder in environment initiatives and especially they were involved in the county tree planting programme

in Kaanwa which was attended by key politicians in the County and led by the Governor. The initiative was funded by KTDA.

Tharaka Nithi Governor Hon Raagwa planting tree during a County tree planting day organized by various stakeholders

In Nyeri County, the CSO network has been able to lobby for increment in the budget allocation in Agriculture through the Minister of finance, and also participated in lobbying for serious scrutiny in Marketing of coffee.

In Meru County, the CSO's Networks "Champions of Nature" has been able to promote advocacy in Natural resources during various County Forums, environment and climate change awareness. In Tigania, which is the dry part of the County, they have spearheaded tree planting initiatives especially in public tracks of Land. They have so far planted trees approximating to 10 hectares in collaboration with the County environment office. They also sell tree seedlings to people willing to plant in their farms.

Photo above: A tree Nursery in Tigania- Meru County, which was initiated and managed by the CSO's Network

The "champions of Nature" have also championed cleaning of Kathita River, the activity that was attended by various politicians from various parts of Meru County.

Challenges encountered by individual CSO's and Network

Irrespective of the gains made within the 2 years of implementation of this project, there are various gaps identified which has hindered realization of set goals and needs to be addressed

- Most organizations are still in formative stages and have not been able to influence much policy change; this therefore calls for capacity building and continued exposure to understand how and when to engage in lobbying and advocacy.
- Lack of leadership and little democratic space which negatively affects participation and trust between the group members.
- Most members of the executive committee are inexperienced in dynamics of leadership,
- Lack of written constitution and rules that would clarify roles and responsibilities, and record keeping for transactions undertaken.
- Lack of income generating activities to contribute to the running of the network. Very little money is made by the tree planting initiative in Tigania.
- Dependency on donors
- Low awareness of the Citizens/Public on the constitution of Kenya, 2010 particularly on critical chapters/articles on NRM including land, Agriculture and other Natural Resources.
- Inadequate funds to support the implementation of all the key activities and to effectively address other NRM factors impacting negatively on Agricultural production.

Recommendations;

We recommend following measures to enhance sustainability of the Networks:
- Capacity building on internal management structures, democracy and transparency should be provided by the mentoring organizations, as well as training in resource mobilization and market linkages for group leaders.
- External support to CSO's should be on a long term, so as to help them learn from their mistakes and build their capacity in organizational, financial management and democratic process. However this should be with an eye on developing leadership and management in the institution.
- Support from public institutions, donors or NGOs
- The CSO's and entire network should conduct an internal assessment through SWOT analysis to identify opportunities that are yet to be explored. This will enhance their management and thus attract more members; be focused leading to the achievement of their goals and objectives. However, they must avoid being too ambitious and expanding the scope or scale of activities too fast. And need to institutionalize learning in their management, monitoring and evaluation.
- Being aggressive in resource mobilization, networking and collaborations
- Identifying a common project on NRM that will involve all NRM CSO's within the network