

Contextualizing integrated conservation and development projects: Restoring the lost 'harambee' link in Kenya

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Abstract

Kenya was at the vanguard of adopting Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs) in the 1980s in response to high population growth rates that posed a serious threat to globally valued ecological zones. But most ICDPs were criticised for failing to deliver on the promise of sustainable development. The failure by project planners to internalise contextual socio-economic factors into project design is often cited as a major cause for the unsatisfactory outcomes. Development practitioners in Kenya consistently utilise self-help collectives structured on a nationally popular concept known as "harambee" to distribute project resources in order to satisfy prevailing community inclusion imperatives. This research utilises a political ecology approach to examine the perceptions of local and external actors involved in implementing a forest-adjacent ICDP among two communities. The study found that the assumed trickle-down effects from the introduced income-generating activities largely failed to materialise. Harambee collectives have a strong normative component for social cohesion in addition to surplus creation functions. The failure to appreciate and internalise these two sometimes contradictory aims by development practitioners resulted in missed opportunities for adaptive learning and greater community engagement that could be potentially transformative to rural development practice in Kenya and beyond.

Keywords

Integrated Conservation and Development Project Harambee Kenya Forestry Collectives Self-help

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