

Payment for Environmental Services: Status and Opportunities in Kenya

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Abstract

Payment for Ecosystem Service (PES) is a market driven tool to motivate upstream land owners to practices land uses that enhance water quantity flows through compensation incentive packages supported by downstream beneficiaries and partners. PES is a voluntary engagement that involves negotiation by sellers and buyers of ecosystem products and services through independent intermediaries. The country is facing high deforestation and degradation rates within the key watersheds that threaten future supply of water for various socioeconomic activities. The PES concept has been around for the last two decades and many projects have been undertaken in the country hence the need to evaluate its adoption rates and subsequent outcomes to inform future direction of research and investments in PES schemes in the country. A study was initiated by Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) and partners in 2016 to collect information on the experiences by several projects in the implementation of PES schemes. This was informed by the fact that information and data on use of PES in watershed management in Kenya is scanty and disjointed hence the needs for comprehensive study to update stakeholders on its status and experiences. Similarly, the country has to manage its watersheds in accordance with international standards and hence needs to tap into the most effective approaches and technologies available within its socioeconomic and ecological contexts. The study results indicate that the country has put in place some policy and legal framework to support PES piloting schemes. The cross sector study identified 15 projects on carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, watershed protection and a bundled combination of these services that have been implemented in the country. PES schemes promoted conservation friendly land uses and offered a wide range of incentives to communities and individuals who are custodians of the natural resources through negotiated engagements. The PES schemes faced several challenges related to high population, smallholder farms, inadequate policy and legal frameworks and governance issues that tended to increase implementation costs and hinder effective participation. The opportunities include a wide range of conservation land uses such as contour terraces, tree planting, grass strips along rivers and differed or controlled grazing in drylands. PES schemes in most cases have provided significant benefits and income opportunities to local communities including increased agricultural incomes, social assets, employment and biodiversity conservation. The experience from pilot PES schemes provides practical lessons that can inform the future design and implementation of PES models within the context of the local situations. The agencies that have interest in forestry and other environment services should continue to pursue the path of PES mechanisms to address environmental degradation and diminishing environmental resources. This is premised on the fact that ES services directly and indirectly support socioeconomic development especially at local levels. However, there is need for some policy and legislative reforms to mainstream PES principles sectoral plans and conservation projects and was enhance enforcement of existing legislation and Acts.

Keywords: payment for ecosystem services, experiences status, watersheds, income opportunities.

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