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## PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WITH WOMEN'S GROUPS IN KENYA: WATERPROJECTS IN LAIKIPIA

The article is a case study of participatory development planning for sustainable development with women's groups in Laikipia District, Kenya, based on the example of the construction of ferrocement watertanks. A crucial factor was to contribute to their security concerning water by generating knowledge with them, by conceptualizing assistance adapted to their structures and by making the conditions and modes of collaboration transparent. The article generalizes outcomes of the method and emphasizes the importance of cultural and gender specific definitions of access, control, use and redistribution of natural resources: in short, the normative and social base of a long-term sustainable development. The participatory method was developed during my study about women's groups in Laikipia (1986-1989) which assisted a Swiss development program in its cooperation with women's groups.

### 1. Women's Need for Water in Laikipia

From early in the morning till late before dark women in Laikipia are on the way to carry water on their backs to their homes. Often they are accompanied by other women and their small daughters, who also carry water. Depending the distance to rivers and small dams, carrying water takes up to five hours per day. (To carry water can assume a quarter of the daily food intake in East Africa; Directorate Generale 1989)

Laikipia District, a high altitude plateau (2500-1600 meters a.s.l.) near the Equator is with its surface of 10.000 km<sup>2</sup> of semi-arid grass and bushland, an area of immigration for small scale peasants, mainly Kikuyu people, who left their densely populated former areas of residence in the Central Province in search for land to cultivate. Population increases due to natural growth and immigration 8% per year (ROK Laikipia District Development Plan 1984-1988). Due to the short period and unreliability of the rains (750-450 mm per year, Berger 1989) crops grow only in less than one third of the area. Farming is to a large extent women's work. They practice intercropping of various types of maize and beans with potatoes as intermediary crop to provide a maximum of security to get some harvest of one or the other crop.



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Historically Laikipia (a Masai Clan name) was grazing ground for Masai pastoralists and a natural border to the neighbouring agriculturalists, the Kikuyu. In 1905, when white settlers began to colonize large tracks of land on which they developed cash crop farming and ranching for export production, the Masai left Laikipia for another area in Kenya and only few remained in the northern edge of today's District in a pastoralist reserve. For sixty years Laikipia was a cattle ranching area of the "White Highlands". Since Independence (1963) a number of farms were bought - and subdivided into smallholdings of 1 to 5 ha - which are further subdivided through inheritance and sales.

The rivers and streams, flowing from Mount Kenya and the Aberdare Range, passing through the District also provide water to the nomadic population of the lowlands further north. Development planning has to take into consideration the growing need of a fast rising population of immigrating small scale farmers and those of the semi-nomadic pastoralists within the ecological limits of available water resources. Due to its former belonging to the colonial White Highlands, Laikipia's infrastructure has been developed for large scale farmers' needs. Today immigrating population faces on unsecure ecological conditions and moreover the necessity to build schools, roads, water projects, cattle dips, market centres and other infrastructure in collaboration with Government in "harambee self help projects".

Many men work in towns outside the District, leaving for large parts farming and the settlement process on their small holdings to the women. In various areas in Laikipia, more than 50% of the peasant holdings are women headed households (average for Kenya 34%; ROK in ILO 1986). Besides involving themselves in self-help projects (Barkan 1989) women also form their own women's groups of 20-50 neighbours, where they seek common solutions for the many problems they face with farming and household maintenance in a newly settled, ecologically and socially unsecure context. 316 women's groups are active in Laikipia today. (In Kenya 4,256 women's groups are registered in 1975 and 14,635 in 1982; ROK in ILO 1986:134). Some exist since 30 years. Either they were formed by large scale farm labourers' women who later developed new activities as soon as their members had their own farms, or they were introduced by the immigrant peasant women (Wacker, i.p.). Similarly to peasant households, women's groups shift in their activities from farming, off-farm income generating, subsistence, welfare and reciprocity between neighbours to improvements of the common surrounding.

## 2. Constructing watertanks with Women's Groups:

How can the limited resources of water be developed in order to serve people needs and to maintain the delicate ecological balance in the semi-arid District? Within a multi-sectoral programme of the Swiss Development Cooperation for sustainable development in Laikipia, a small side-line activity, the construction of ferrocement watertanks with women's groups developed into a very successful programme. The examination of the features of the watertank-programme leads to generalisations about planning sustainable development with women's groups exceeding the scope of that specific programme and area. Within four years 25 groups have built more than 600 ferrocement watertanks to meet domestic

needs for water. The waterjar contains 500 gallons, enough water for cleaning, cooking and drinking for two months for a family of six.

The construction of one watertank takes five working days. The women's group works together to build one tank after the other to each of its members. On a foundation of gravel and sand a large bag is set, then filled with manure and closed with a string. The outside of the bag is plastered with cement, then envelopped with chicken wire, then plastered again with several layers of cement. After drying, the manure is extracted and the bag removed. With an inside cover of waterproof cement, a lid and a tap, the tank is ready. Gutters collect the rainwater from iron sheet roofs and fill the tank.

The news about the watertank-programme spread rapidly in the District and many leaders of women's groups asked representatives from the ministry concerned as well as members of the programme for training and assistance in order to build their own tanks. How could the waterjar-programme grow? Could the women's groups, once they knew the technique of constructing tanks, teach other groups in their area? Could women's groups also - by joining together - form organizations for larger projects? And, why do women's groups even want to build their own watertanks when there is already in their area a larger waterproject under construction? Why is the waterjar-programme so popular?

After some successful outcomes with the first women's groups, the question arose, how this project could be standardized. What were the conditions for a sustainable development? Answers to these and other questions related to the organisational and social conditions of sustainable development were found through the process of participatory research and development planning with women's groups.

### 3. Women's culture: the root for sustainable development

To plan sustainable development with women's groups in a participatory way became possible after evaluating the culture of the women and their groups. With the term "culture" I mean the economic base, the organisation, the knowledge and the norms, regulations and authorities within groups (Wacker 1990). They can provide the necessary control inside and outside the group in order to use resources managed by the members through the group in a sustainable way for a long period of time. Women have an important role in the informal management of resources. Their main organizations to promote development are the women's groups. It took some time to understand, that women's groups in Laikipia have roots in 5 different traditions, which are interacting today. Each tradition is linked with a phase in the history of women's groups in Kenya and has shaped norms, objectives and expectations of members who join together in groups.

#### 3.1. Culture of subsistence farming

The majority of the 316 women's groups in Laikipia are formed by the rural farming population, mostly Kikuyu. Traditionally both genders were involved in subsistence production, their work was complementary and largely autonomous. Kikuyu men cleared the virgin forests and prepared the soils and women planted, harvested and prepared the crops (Kenyatta, Routledge, Smock). Both genders were part of social organizations, based on lineages, clans and on age class sets, in which they co-operated for common concerns (Kershaw).

In Laikipia, the eldest women's groups still existing today started in the swamps. On various large scale farms, women of labourers working under the squatter system were allowed to cultivate vegetables on natural swamps, if they could drain them. They organised themselves in groups and, by digging canals and clearing the bush, soil was made available to them for farming. Their base for co-operation were two Kikuyu traditions: "ngwathio" (a system of collaboration for cultivating and weeding the gardens between neighbouring women, in which each woman receives once a week the help by the others and repays the assistance on equal terms) . "Matega" is the tradition to bring firewood and water neighbouring women after the birth of a baby and receiving the same assistance in one's own same situation (systems of reciprocity).

### 3.2. Crisis networks:

Colonial rule in Kenya brought three major changes which determined women's paths into development. The fertile land in Kenya (20% of the surface; van Zwanenberg, King 1975) was subdivided. On "White Highlands", like Laikipia, settlers produced cash crops or beef for export by employing men as migrant labourers or as "squatters". Compared to migrant labourers who worked periodically on the large farms, squatters lived with their families on the "White Highlands" in arrangements allowing them to cultivate portions of unused land and to work for half of the year for the settlers production. In demarcated "Native Reserves" women complemented men's wages by agricultural and trading activities, in addition to subsistence farming, childcare and household tasks (Stichter 1982). An increasing share of the household unit's production was thus transferred to women, but women were not involved directly into the modern economy. In 1954 land adjudication (Swynnerton plan) in the "Native Reserves" introduced private property of land (Sorrenson 1967). Women lost their traditional rights to the land and thereby the security to make a living for themselves and their children (Byamukama 1985). The loss of security was not compensated by new income earning possibilities, and poverty became widespread. Overloaded with work (due also to forced labour for the development of infrastructure), with absent husbands for long periods, and struggling with poverty, women intensified their networks of co-operation. "Ngwathio" and "matega" systems were extended to various situations of need. The normative basis remained similar: each woman gives assistance to a distinct group of other women who do the same for her. In Laikipia very poor people are landless people who live in the forest or in illegal squatter villages on land belonging to other people. Their groups act as crisis networks.

### 3.3. Welfare and handicraft groups as colonial institution:

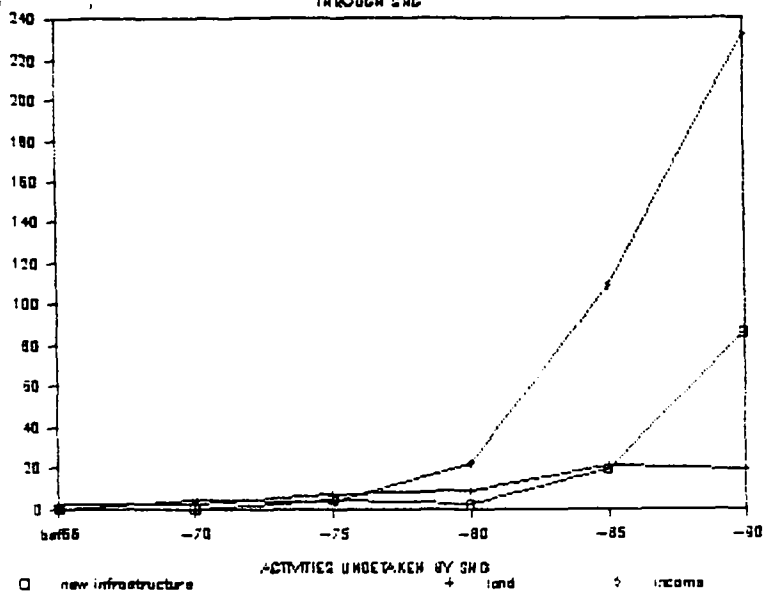
The involvement of women into the modern political and economical system occurred only in the fifties when native welfare policy was introduced in Kenya. Women joined into "Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Clubs" for handicraft, housewifery and welfare activities. During colonial times, within the system of "indirect rule" some of the men's traditional organizations, mainly the "Elder's Council", were legalized in a new function under the authority of a Chief, while women's traditional organizations remained informal. They were not part of the newly established formal structures of colonial rule. Paths of separated development between the genders evolved together with expanded agricultural production based on the sexual division of African labour between "White Highlands" and the "Native Reserves". Due to widespread poverty and landlessness in the "Native Reserves", accentuated through the expulsion of 100.000 squatters from the "White Highlands" back to their "Native Reserves" during the fifties, women got involved into wage labour in increasing numbers until today. Yet, in 1983, women were still only 20%

of the paid wage labourforce (ILO 1986:12). Low wages in the modern sector emphasize the division of labour between the genders. Women produce foodcrops, raise the children and provide the subsistence base for family members, who, when becoming jobless in the towns, return to their homes. Sexually divided paths of development also weakened links within the families. Poorer women often do not get remittances from the family members working in the modern sector. With the loss of land rights and securities bound to customary rights and without equal access opportunities in modern money economy poverty is widespread among rural women in Kenya.

Apart from their involvement in women's groups, women are underrepresented in the institutions on District and national level dealing with issues that touch women's lives directly. In Parliament 1983 only 1,0% were women, in Local Government 2,1% (ILO 1986:143,144). With few exceptions, women still today are not represented in official politics. They can influence decision-making only through indirect and informal means. In Laikipia the first Clubs were formed in the forest areas, in which landless people worked in sawmills (many of them women and children). On some large scale farms women were organized in Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Clubs, doing handicraft and periodically receiving training in "modern" women's skills like cooking pancakes and washing with OMO soap, provided by the East African Industries. The self-organization tradition of women was reshuffled through Community Development policy into authoritarian structures. Women, who until then were neglected by colonial policy and restricted economically to subsistence production, were now integrated into modern policy in the sectors of welfare and homecrafts. A number of women's groups on Laikipia's large scale farms still have Maendeleo Club activities today, often under the leadership of women who were trained during the late colonial time.

#### 3.4. Peasant movements:

Poverty was a major reason for the peasant movement for land and independence of the fifties called "Mau Mau". After independence, through the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta, the movement's members were politically integrated into nation building. The subdivision of "White Highland" farms was part of the policy to give access to new land to the many landless squatters and people in overcrowded reserves. Kenyatta, first President of Kenya, encouraged women to organize themselves as "nyakenuas" (leading women) into groups (called "mabati groups" because they often buy as credit circles corrugated iron-sheets to members), to dance traditional dances and involve themselves in the process of building a nation. During the late sixties a number of Maendeleo Clubs in Laikipia changed their names and started new activities. By dancing their traditional dances women expressed their needs to the President: most of the groups in Laikipia were dancing for land: land for them to cultivate. During the era of Kenyatta policy was favourable to women's need and request of land, some of the "nyakenua" or "mabati" groups managed to buy land for their members at subsidized prices through forming credit circles and requesting audience and assistance by Government for their needs. Their rules consist in pooling efforts and money together and on the same time in offering self help contributions and loyalty to outsiders who in their turn will eventually assist the groups in their needs and projects.



Women's groups in Laikipia buying land  
(own investigation)

### 3.5. Income Generating Policy in the eighties:

During the women's decade and as a result of the District Focus Policy for decentralized rural development in Kenya and its machinery of District Development Planning women's groups were encouraged to start income generating projects with credits provided as Special Rural Development Funds and the Women's Bureau. Although peasant women in Laikipia do need income because job-opportunities are scarce and farming often fails due to drought, the introduced projects failed, when the risks were beyond women's control. E.g. producing trouts or rising pigs to be sold in the distant capital Nairobi, where women seldom travel and lack language skills to negotiate fair prices. Concerning group-rules, income generating projects are often based on the system, that each member gets group-benefits in relation to its work and skill similar to the ones in small enterprises.

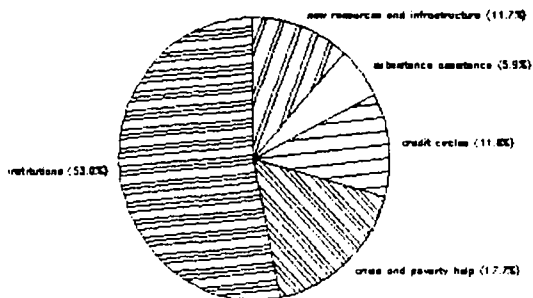
### 3.6. Balancing risks and group-activities:

Today's women's groups bear different traditions and different rules, often within the single group. Rules of direct reciprocity are rooted in traditional subsistence farming and crisis assistance, welfare activities towards members and other people are based on the system of giving when need there is, improvement of the infrastructure consist in pooling efforts and funds together; systems of individual benefits are related to individuals' contribution and productivity. During the last five years women's groups became more and more involved in assisting the members with funeral expenses and schoolfunds. These are signs of growing poverty in Laikipia. Despite this variety the existing women's groups in Laikipia are all under the administration of the Ministry of Cultural and Social Services. Although the women's decade and the District Focus have given priority to income oriented activities for women's groups, practical advice refers to a large extent to the type of Community Development established in the fifties.

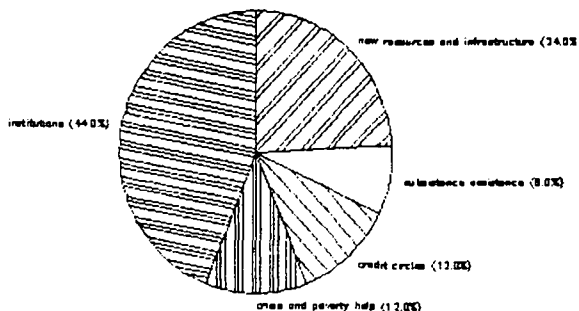
A majority of the groups are involved in several activities simultaneously. They "balance" from an income-generating activity to a redistributing welfare help or to a credit circle and from a Government sponsored project to an autonomous self help enterprise. Economically "balancing" involves shifts to and from income and risk generating projects to subsistence oriented activities, administratively they "balance" between collaborating with outsiders' help and withdrawing their participation in order to return to autonomous activities. The major reason for balancing is the need of women to find means of security in their groups. Peasant women's households are faced with many risks arising from the ecological context (rains, soil fertility and erosion), the market and from politics outside women's control. The groups have a security function to assist women in bearing the risks connected with the insecurities of the modern economy and of the ecological context in a semi-arid area.

# Women's groups activities in Laikipia District: 1966 - 1989 (own investigation)

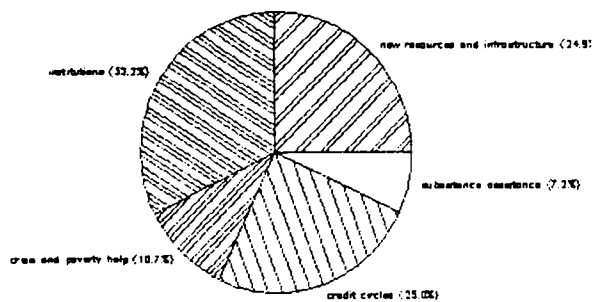
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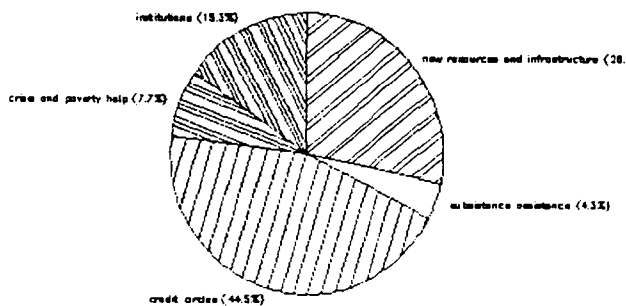
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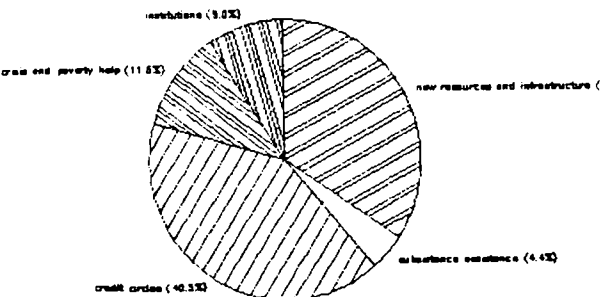
SHG ACTIVITY-TYPES 1970-74  
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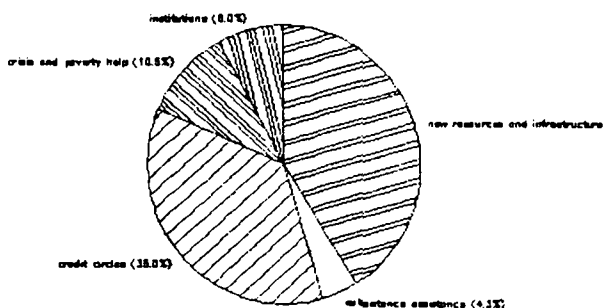
SHG ACTIVITY-TYPES 1975-79  
IN LAIKIPIA DISTRICT



SHG ACTIVITY-TYPES 1980-84  
IN LAIKIPIA DISTRICT



SHG ACTIVITY-TYPES 1985-90  
IN LAIKIPIA DISTRICT





#### 4. Reasons for Success of the Watertankprogramm:

The watertank project was succesful because a proposal was made, which was well suited to the women's groups control capacities and needs. With settlement the inmigrant peasant women develop social intergation of the people in their area. Mutual control and normative settings are established. They are the base for long term planning and resource control. The watertank programm brought only a limited intervention by outsiders. Once built, the watertanks are under control of each individual woman. Some groups manage larger long term projects in common e.g. a shop, but in general, as credit circles their rules are limited to pulling means together and redistributing them for individual use. In order to get some security, women have developed a range of strategies on economical and political level. Key word is flexibility. Although the actual construction of watertanks takes only five days, in average the groups were involved in construction for two to three years until all 20-30 members had their tanks built. The time needed is linked with poverty - the costs of one tank is aproximatively equivalent to eight months work of casual labour. It is also due to the fact, that groups need time to organize themselves, to make rules and control assets within the members' as well as within their local context. Sustainable development is built on the culture of the people. In areas like Laikipia in which men are migrant labourers and women sedentarian peasants, areas in which administration is only in process of developing itself and where adminstrative staff often changes its place of work, sustainable development assistance was succesful when built on the basis of peasant women's work and organisation, when it was integrated in the existing production-systems.

The standardisation of the watertank programme became possible after a participatory evaluation process, during which all women's groups in a specific area were involved in planing and evaluating the tank-project. The participatory planning started with solving



problems in a group. It consisted in bringing informations to the women's groups and assisting them in solving their problems with their own means (Wacker 1990). Compared to classical evaluations which bring knowledge from the people to the donor or government, participatory procedure seeks a dialogue with the women, in which their own capacity to solve problems and find solutions is strengthened. Through participatory evaluation we learned that networking processes of the project are limited. Women are overloaded with work and do not have neither the means not the time to travel far for teaching watertank construction to other groups. As soon as a project brings influence and income it is likely to escape women's areas of control. The watertank programme was standardized by advertizing in public to all groups in one area the aim, scope and conditionalities of the tank construction. Then the groups could decide if and when they would like to learn the new technique. Two trained masons travel to their area and teach one group after the other by constructing three tanks with them, afterwards the groups continues constructions and the masons come for periodical visits. Waterprojects with rivers, in which various ministeries are involved and planing has to be made on broad level, do not include women's participation in decision-making. History shows that women usually lost when they had to compete for scarce resources and could develop only in spaces not colonized or used by others. In colonial Laikipia these were the swamps. In the sixties the newly available land of former white ranches, today natural resources which are not used (yet) by others: swamps, trees for bee-keeping, market shops in new centres etc... Peasant women who were able to buy land could construct watertanks, landless people (squatters) lack the means to built and control long-term waterproject. In larger water projects, although women contribute to the construction itself, the dam of piped water, from which they eventually will get water bears risks which are beyond their control. Water is only a resource when it is culturally accessible to the people: knowledge, means of control and organization, as well as the material requests (money, technology) have to be controlled by the users in order to provide them with safe water.

## 5. Conclusions

Sustainable development aims at reducing risks and enhancing security.

Waterprojects might provide more security concerning ecological risks (e.g. lack of rain) but introduce new socio-cultural risks, when their planning is not done conform to the culture of the people, in a learning process which enables the water-users to effectively control the project once it is constructed and under use. Participatory development planning starts before the project is planned. It considers the four elements of culture: the economic base of the organization of users (e.g. the peasant households) their organisation itself (e.g. women's groups), their norms, authorities and means of control as well as their knowledge about the natural resources' use and maintenance. A succesful way of planning waterprojects with women's groups consisted in making group-discussions with them by evaluating the waterproject from the point of view of its use (costs of maintenance, control of technology and decision making) once it will be built. Only when the means of control for sustainable use are clear and the group decided to realize the project, then only the actual planning of construction could start.

But even then new risks can arise at any time: ecological risks and socio-cultural risks, which have not been anticipated by the group before starting the construction. Sustainable development can only be promoted out of the strength in problem solving. Participatory methods of planning include the promotion of knowledge and control (decision-making) by

the users before the project is technically built. To plan sustainable development, safety is a crucial factor. Women do need the normatives, political and participative social control over the technical improvement a program can provide to them.

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