

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT IN TANZANIA: EARLY EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS

Washington Mutayoba, Faraji Saidi and Rafik Hirji¹
August 28, 2001

Abstract

Tanzania is currently undergoing major political, social and economic reforms with the main goal of addressing its widespread poverty and promoting economic growth. Major reforms in the water sector are underway, in the water supply and sanitation sectors, decentralization, full cost recovery and increased role of the private sector are being embraced, and a strategy for managing cross sectoral water resources issues and challenges using river basins as units for planning and managing water resources is under implementation on pilot river basins. Tanzania faces many paradoxical challenges. Although it is endowed with abundant natural resources, including water, it remains one of the poorest nations in the world, in part, because it has not: adequately developed its natural resources (such as soil, water, forest, fisheries), fully harnessed its human resources potential and capacity, and asserted its interests effectively in international negotiations. It only began to undertake serious reforms recently. Tanzania faces severe water scarcity at a local level, while at the same time, it is riparian to all 3 of the largest freshwater lakes in Africa, and on average, has abundant water resources (2700 m³/capita/yr). Droughts are frequent events and cause unreliable supplies and shortages. Droughts have however not caused the water management problems, but have highlighted the weaknesses in the water allocation and water rights administration system which have resulted in intense water shortages and water use conflicts. Tanzania is amongst the nations' with the largest proportion of land area under protection and conservation, yet it is facing the world's greatest mass species extinctions recorded in recent history. In a region that is mired in serious ethnic, political and social strife, Tanzania remains unusually stable politically as a nation state and its people uncharacteristically cohesive socially. Both factors contribute to the positive investment climate in the country. Tanzania was once heralded for its social development policies, socialist ideology, centralized planning, a massive state supported but largely externally driven rural water supply program and a charismatic leader Dr. Julius Nyerere. Nyerere, even after his death commands respect as the greatest African statesman and social thinker of his time and his legacy—people centered policies and social development—still command a strong bearing on the national and regional politics. Today Tanzania is known in the region for its economic reforms, market access to the private sector, decentralized planning and development, and its urban water supply boards reforms, cost recovery and autonomy, many ideals which ironically have been possible to strive towards in a peaceful manner because of the social and political foundation that Nyerere laid.

¹ Mr. Washington Mutayoba is the Project Coordinator and Mr. Faraji Saidi is the Rufiji Basin Water Advisor for the River Basin Management component of the IDA funded River Basin Management and Smallholder Irrigation Improvement Project (RBMSIIP). Rafik Hirji, a Senior Water Resources Management Specialist, in the Environment Department of the World Bank has supported the preparation and occasional supervision of the project. The views expressed herein are of the authors' and do not reflect the views of the institutions they represent.

The social and economic transformation in Tanzania has been accompanied by many challenges. Effective water management was once an art form that had been perfected over the last two centuries by the Wachagga community smallholder farmers on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro is now a serious problem confronting lowland farmers and power companies on the same river basin, but on a larger scale. As populations have grown and economic performance steadily improved, the demands for water for domestic, industrial, agriculture, mining, livestock, and power supply interests have also increased. The rapid population and economic growth have not been accompanied by an equal rate of development in services--water, sewerage, agricultural and energy supplies, and waste disposal – but, on the contrary, in growing competition over water, increasing pollution, land degradation and other stresses on the water resources. Climate variability makes water supply uncertain and vulnerable. The numerous international water bodies that Tanzania is riparian to compound the water management challenge. The policy and institutional frameworks have not been adequate to address the multiplicity of the water management problems. The human and institutional capacities to address the complex management challenges of competing demands of multi-sectoral users of water have not kept pace with the growing needs. Many different types of water and land use conflicts have emerged and the capacity to resolve conflicts is limited. Economic liberalization has also improved access to information and knowledge about the working of government agencies and to information sharing and is accompanied with mixed outcomes. Transparency is contributing to increased public pressure and is having a positive influence on agencies to become more accountable for their actions and this is contributing to improved decision making, but it has also opened up a Pandora's box. Tanzania is also more vulnerable to fringe groups and agencies that seek to further narrow self interests than to support the difficult social and economic transformation. Transparency and public debate have, on the other hand, also contributed to a better understanding of both the supporting and constraining roles played by external support agencies in the development process.

This paper discusses the ongoing reforms to improve water resources management in Tanzania, which are in their infancy and remain an early work in progress. It focuses on the development of emerging river basin management institutions and capacity. The paper first describes the important role of water in Tanzania's socio-economic development and discusses the main characteristics of water resources, water uses and water management approaches. This is followed by a summary of the different types of water use and land use conflicts that have emerged and pose a serious challenge to water managers and to the sunk water resources investments in selected basins. The third part of the paper presents the government's multi-pronged strategy for addressing the water resources management problems facing the country, and this includes a summary of the World Bank supported investments in the country, and how that has helped shape the strategy. The major achievements that have been accomplished and the remaining challenges including institutional barriers to the difficult reform process ahead are summarized in part four of the paper. Finally, lessons are drawn to guide both the ongoing and new efforts and investments for meeting the country's priority needs. These lessons also have important implications for the Bank's continued engagement to support water resources management reforms and investments both in Tanzania and elsewhere in SSA.