

Series 2 – Social Pillar: Environment, Water, Sanitation and Regional Development

Domestication of the Ramsar Convention in Kenya

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Key Messages

Government of Kenya needs to do better in term of policies to integrate the Ramsar Convention.

Policies should be focused on having more prescriptions to meet Ramsar obligations.

The Wetland Conservation and Management Policy should be the pillar of domestication of the Ramsar Convention.

Context

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. Wetlands are a critical component of the natural environment. They reduce the impact of flooding by absorbing excess water, are habitats for plant and animal species, and are a major source of water-human activities. Wetlands are critical for the maintenance of life on earth. Kenya's wetland cover is approximately 14,000 km², which is 3 to 4 per cent of the country's surface area (Government of Kenya, 2015). To protect Kenya's wetlands, the country signed the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar, 1971) on October 5, 1990, and ratified it on June 5, 1991. By 2019, the country had designated six Ramsar sites, namely, Lake Nakuru (1990), Lake Naivasha (1995), Lake Bogoria (2001), Lake Baringo (2002), Lake Elementaita (2005), and River Tana (2012). The domestication of the Ramsar Convention in Kenya through better integration of the convention obligations into policy frameworks would assure the conservation and protection of the Country's wetlands. The focal agency is the Kenya Wildlife Service working with other government institutions including the National Environmental Management Authority, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, and stakeholders such as the World Wildlife Fund.

Approach and Results

Domestication of the convention was evaluated on the extent to which its obligations are integrated into Kenya's policy frameworks, specifically the Wetlands Conservation and Management Policy (GoK, 2015), Environment Policy (GoK, 2013), Wildlife Policy (GoK, 2012), National Constitution of Kenya (GoK, 2010), and the Sessional Paper No. 6 on Environment and Development (GoK, 1999). Selected obligations were: 1- Designation of wetlands for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance; 2-Conservation, wise use and management of wetlands and migratory stocks of waterfowl; 3-Formulation and implementation of plans to promote conservation and wise use of wetlands; 4-Research, monitoring and exchanging of data and training; 5-increasing waterfowl population in wetlands without altering wetlands; 6-Consultation and cooperation between countries, communities and other stakeholders through education, public participation; 7-Representatives to Conference of Parties be trained experts in wetlands/waterfowl management; 8-Parties to inform International Union for Conservation of Nature of every change in the ecological character of wetlands; 9-Regular reporting on conservation, management and wise use of wetlands and biodiversity, and 10-Establishing natural reserves on wetlands.

The Obligation Integration Susceptibility Index (OISI) was used to measure the extent of integration of the obligations into

Lake Naivasha
(Photo: Wikimedia)



the policy frameworks. Scores of 90-100 per cent are regarded as Excellent; 70-89 per cent as Very Good; 50-69 per cent as Good; 40-49 per cent as Poor. while those below 40 per cent are regarded as Very Poor. The OISI results indicated that the Wetland Policy had 52 prescriptions for all 10 obligations, thus its obligation integration was 100 per cent or excellent in the OISI scale. For the other policies: the Wildlife Policy had 17 prescriptions for 9 obligations (90 per cent integration-excellent); Sessional Paper Number 6 had 10 prescriptions for 7 obligations (70 per cent-Very Good); the Environment Policy had 15 prescriptions for 6 obligations (60 per cent integration-Good); the Constitution of Kenya had 5 prescriptions for 3 obligations (30 per cent integration-Very Poor) (Shah, 2016).

Individual Policy Prescriptions (IPP) were used to assess the level of integration by checking the policy prescriptions with the obligations (see Figure 1). All five policies had prescriptions addressing 2-Conservation, wise use and management of wetlands and migratory stocks of waterfowl corresponding to a 100 per cent score. This was followed by 3-Formulation and implementation of plans to promote conservation and wise use of wetlands with a score of 42.8 per cent. The remaining obligations had very few prescriptions with 1-Designation of wetlands for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance having the least with an IPP score of 0.78 per cent (Shah, 2016).

Policy Recommendations

Short-Term

- Involve stakeholders in developing/amending policies including direct communities, academia, water

resource authorities and non-governmental organisations.

- Develop a communication strategy for community-based wetland management initiatives.

Medium-Term

- Amending existing policies to include all Ramsar obligations. This would pave way for the country to have more wetlands under protected area status.
- Have more policies to safeguard wetlands, for example, a Biodiversity Policy should be given priority. The Wetlands Policy on its own is not enough.
- Policies in draft form should be amended and signed for domestication. This would make communities at the grass-root level better aware of conservation strategies.
- Harmonize different roles played by different agencies and put them under one institution for the protection of Ramsar sites.
- Develop a mechanism whereby economic values of all wetland uses can be assessed.

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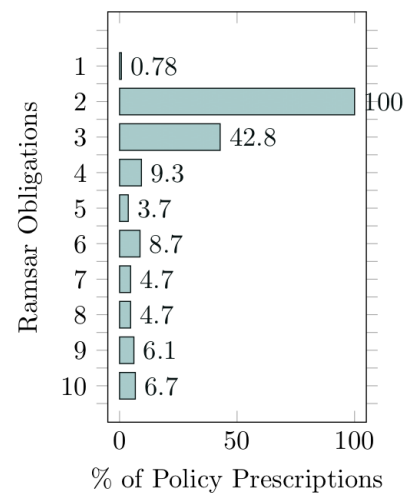


Figure 1: Level of Ramsar Convention obligation integration in policy prescriptions (per cent of integrated obligations versus national policies).

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