Gender and Protection of Natural Resources; A Case of Land, Forests and Water Resources in Kenya

Everlyne Nairesiae

The state of land, forest and water as natural resources are not well known or documented in Kenya, a situation which could have influenced its poor governance particularly in administration and management. Participation of women and men, the youth, children and people with disability in matters affecting their lives has been found to be a critical ingredient to sustainable development. There is glaring gender gap in the composition and capacity for representation of women and the youth in decision making levels concerning land, forest and water resources particularly in respective committees and forest associations. Such decision making platforms continue to be seen as the preserve of the male in most patriarchal communities in Kenya including the pastoralist communities. Few women and youth have in most instances lack technical skills for their effective representation. On this account most decisions concerning land use planning and administration, water and forest resource management fails to take into account gender dimensions and therefore impacting negatively on women, youth and children’s social and economic development. The situation can be attributable to inadequate information on gender roles and available policy provisions, in respect for gender roles as define by culture and lack of political will to increase and respect gender affirmative action. As a result, land, forest and water resources continue to be fast depleted as important sections of the community is left in the dark and less empowered to drive demand for action towards sustainable use and protection of such resources. SEETO Kenya is a non-profit organization founded in 2004 and registered in 2009 under societies act. The organization is made up of a network of community based organizations that are women and youth led (www.seetokenya.org). The organization pays keen attention to the role of women, youth and children in influencing natural resource management with particular interest in the Pastoralist Maasai communities in Kenya. Through SEETO’s targeted education and awareness, action research and training, communities are continuously gaining confidence to challenge and influence systems, policies and structures in place to ensure gender participation in natural resource management and protection. The structural and policy frameworks put in place by the National Land Policy and the constitution of Kenya requires mapping and documentation of public land and other natural resources which is of critical importance not only for information but also administration, conservation and sustainable management. There is much that needs to be done to enhance civic education on the new policy provisions and role of women and youth in management and protection of land, forests and water resources in Kenya.