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**Kenyan civil society perspectives on rights, rights-based approaches to development, and participation**

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## Summary

This paper goes beyond conceptual debates to explore country level practice around emergent rights-based approaches to development, and their relationship with more established practices of participatory development. Drawing from the perspectives of a cross-section of Kenyan civil society groups, the paper examines the extent to which these approaches overlap, and evaluates the prospects for an integrated and sustained approach to civil society's questioning of institutional arrangements that foster unequal relations. Current trends suggest a gradual closing of the chasm between the practice of participatory community development and the practice of rights advocacy: community development NGOs are taking more seriously the notion of people's rights and entitlements as the starting point for their work, and the need for greater engagement with macro-level political institutions to build accountability; rights advocacy NGOs are responding to demands for active and meaningful participation of marginalised groups in shaping a rights advocacy agenda that is genuinely rooted in communities; and community-based networks are looking inward to ensure internal legitimacy, inclusiveness and non-discrimination. These trends hold promise for an integrated and sustained approach that is potentially more effective in Kenya's new political climate characterised by stronger demands for accountability at different levels. The paper concludes with suggestions on how these emerging trends can be strengthened.

Keywords: rights, participation, civil society, social movements.