

Working With Communities for Increased Impact

For many years, a lot of research and development projects have been carried out in the dryland regions of Kenya with an aim of enhancing sustainability of dryland ecosystems and improving livelihoods. In spite of these efforts, the dryland regions continue to face enormous ecological, social and economic challenges. Sustainable development of these areas has been constrained by inadequate human capacity, limited action research and lack of participation by the dryland communities as end users, among other challenges.

According to Prof. J.T. Njoka, Director, Centre for Sustainable Dryland Ecosystems and Societies (CSDES), many development approaches in Kenya's drylands have been accused of doing little to actively engage communities in dryland in problem identification, planning and implementation of programs targeting them, "By directly engaging the communities in problem identification and seeking interventions with them, development will be more targeted and hence increase impact". Therefore, CSDES has embraced a community participatory approach with an aim of identifying dryland challenges and seeking solutions together with the communities.

In 2011, CSDES awarded partial funding to thirteen UoN students to undertake research for development. The students were supposed to research on a topic that addresses specific needs of dryland communities. They were expected to identify and work closely with a research assistant/intern from the communities where they intended to carry out their research. After completing their research, the students were to hold a feedback workshop in the community to disseminate their findings back to the communities.

So far, CSDES in partnership with other players in drylands have held three such workshops in three counties in Kenya-Isiolo, Marsabit and Laikipia. The workshops have provided the much needed platform for disseminating findings of CSDES-supported participatory research as well as providing an opportunity to gather feedback from stakeholders in the counties.

Speaking in one of the research feedback workshops held at Marsabit, the Deputy Governor of Marsabit County Hon. Omar Abdi expressed optimism that research will provide a road map to empower the communities in resilience. "I am glad to note that the objectives of this workshop are consistent with the first pillar of Kenyan Vision 2030 towards food security and the inclusive development that factors equal opportunities for all groups and especially the under-represented ones", he noted.