

COLLECTIVE ARRANGEMENTS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS: COPING STRATEGIES FOR THE POOR HOUSEHOLDS IN THE GREAT RUAHA CATCHMENT IN TANZANIA

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Physics and Chemistry of Earth 32 (2007)

1315-1321

Access to water and land resources underpins the socio-economic fabric of many societies in the Southern Africa region, which is characterized broadly as underdeveloped with widespread food insecurity, exacerbated by persistent droughts, erratic rainfall and increasing human populations. The availability of land and water resources is increasingly diminishing and becoming a stumbling block to the development of the agrarian societies in the region. The poor households have in turn adopted new livelihood coping mechanisms but little research has been done to assess the effectiveness of the 'instruments'. Consequently, the concepts of sustainable water resources management and agricultural development have remained elusive and poorly understood by policy makers as well as by water resources planners and managers. Recognizing this, a study was conducted between 2002 and 2005 under the RIPARWIN (Raising Irrigation Productivity and Releasing water for Intersectoral Needs) Project to assess the spatial dynamics of livelihood capital, vulnerability and coping strategies for the poor agrarian households in the Upper Great Ruaha River Catchment (GRRC) in Tanzania. The result of analysis showed an array of livelihood platforms and institutional contexts that act to shape the existing livelihood typologies in the GRRC. In addition, the results showed a gradual increase in household vulnerability from upstream to downstream, particularly in terms of access to physical and natural assets. Vulnerability was found to be directly associated with the number of dependants. The female-headed households were relatively more likely to be vulnerable than the male-headed households (cf. probabilities of 27% and 21% respectively). The value of collective arrangements and drawing on social networks crosscut all social strata and

ranked as the most common livelihood strategy. This suggests that the scope for reducing vulnerability among the poor households in the GRRC critically depends on the existing institutional arrangements and mechanisms. Of paramount importance is perhaps the need to facilitate the establishment and empowerment of water use associations and apex bodies. In the study area, this appears to be promising enough to build 'strong' institutional platforms through which water and land resources would be managed sustainability.

Keywords: Rural livelihoods; Livelihoods assets; Social capital; Collective arrangement; Great Ruaha River Catchment.