

Analysing the failure of collective action: The case of Lake Turkana Fishermen Cooperative Society Ltd. in Kenya

Ochieng, R., Wolff, A., Hanisch, M.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Albrecht Daniel Thaer-Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences, Division Faculty of Life sciences, Berlin, Germany

Corresponding author: Reagan Ochieng, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Msc. Integrated Natural Resource Management, Berliner Str. 9, 16728 , Angermunde Germany/ ochiengr@hu-berlin.de

Abstract

Studies have shown that for many decades Kenya's Turkana region has experienced several multi-dimensional challenges, the biggest of all being the harsh semi-arid climate and the economic marginalization. Nevertheless, the Turkana community has been resilient over the years mostly due to collective action and support from both the government and non-governmental agencies in terms of relief aid. However, the case of Lake Turkana Fishermen Cooperative Society Limited (TFCS) tells a different story: having gone bankrupt even with immense support, a critical analysis is needed to fully understand the fundamentals of cooperation.

We are using Elinor Ostrom's design principles as an analytical tool to explore the failure of this fisheries cooperative in Kenya. As Ostrom predicts, success depends on how fit the institutional arrangements are to the features of the social dilemma and local conditions that include bio-physical conditions. Reflecting on various semi-structured interviews with fishermen, authorities, and experts from Kalokol region and based on own first-hand experience of growing up in the fisheries community, this paper examines the case of TFCS from an institutional economic point of view. The failure of TFCS provides an excellent example to understand why the well-meant is often badly done: It evaluates to what extent the top-down approach by the Kenyan government, biophysical conditions as well as cultural aspects of the Turkana community were relevant factors that led to the failure of TFCS. The findings illustrate the importance of addressing resource management challenges with external international and governmental contributions that have severe impacts on local communities. The necessity and importance to include and define "beneficiaries" rather as active stakeholders who influence the outcome of -in this case- the institution of a cooperative will be emphasized.