

## Cost sharing and free water policy in semi-arid rural Kenya

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In Kilembwa and Kangii, rural areas of Machakos County, Central Kenya, the Government laid the waterworks in 1975, and the Mwala Water and Sanitation Company is now managing it. This waterworks has repeated a stop and restoration in the face of the high pumping cost from the Athi River, and it has a limit in water supply area. Therefore, local people are still depending on boreholes, reservoirs, sand dams, and water scooped from the bed of seasonal rivers. This situation will not change with the installation of a new water supply system (gravity-fed) planned by the Government.

The waterworks and boreholes with support of NGO, JICA, etc. in the study area have supplied water with the cost sharing principle, especially after the water sector reform by 2002 and the 2016 Water Acts. On the other hand, in 2013 and afterwards, the transfer of water supply authority from the National to County governments progressed, and in Machakos, the Governor and Members of County Assembly (MCAs) established many new boreholes towards the general elections in 2017, beginning to supply people free water. This study reports water uses among the people, the relation between cost sharing water provision and free water policy, and the influence of politicization of water provision on its socio-economic sustainability, especially focusing on the following two points.

### (1) Catchment areas of water sources and water use

Many existing studies do not consider that water may be used for a productive purpose. This study therefore selected sample households supposing competition between domestic water use and water supply for dairy cattle. It conducted a household random sampling (20%) in 16 Kilembwa villages with the waterworks network nearby and comparatively many dairy cooperative members, and in 9 Kangii village with no waterworks and few cooperative members. It conducted around 200 interviews with these sampled households and cooperative members in the area.

### (2) The influence of County free water policy on cost sharing principle of existing boreholes

An NGO-supported borehole with cost sharing principle started to operate in 2009, but it was suspended due to accounting problem of its water committee. The County Government, with an initiative of a local MCA, took over and rehabilitated it, and is supplying people free water from 2017. Views of the local administrative officers and water committee members on this free water policy are in disagreement: some are in the skeptical opinion which casts doubt on the financial strength after the next elections, and others credited the positive statement that understands and supports the policy as encouraging water supply to the poor and avoiding the accounting problem.

Since the cost sharing borehole supported and established by JICA in 2013 was located in the neighborhood of the above-mentioned rehabilitated county borehole with free water, the number of its users decreased, and in spite of water abundance, it stopped operating in 2017 after the vicious circle of a pump fuel financial deficit, a lowering utilization level, and rising "salt" concentration.

The study found some cases in which an NGO and church institution refused to make free their water provision despite the request by the County Government and a ruling party MCA, and a case where the same request resulted in refusal and interruption of an NGO borehole development. This is because they

tried to secure socioeconomic sustainability of water supply and avoid politicization of borehole provision by those in power.

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