

New plans of managing water resources

Poor management of water resources in Kenya has cost this country dearly. Conservative estimates place this loss to about Ksh. 35 billion (\$487 million) annually and still counting. Against this backdrop, Kenya is classified as water scarce because its natural endowment is currently 21 billion cubic meters (m³). If shared equally among its 32 million people, each person can only get 647 m³ of water per year. This is way below the global benchmarks which is 1,000m³ of water per person per year.

The reasons for this are many but the primary cause is that the current rules on water resources are ineffective. They mainly emphasize development and not management of water resources. As a result, there has been devastating degradation of catchment areas leading to loss of forest cover estimated at between 6,000 to 9,000 hectares per year. It is such vulnerability to the effects of neglect of water sources and degradation that has necessitated a significant policy response and action.

New instruments

Two instruments that are intended to counter this challenge have been developed; The *National Water Resources Management Strategy 2006-2008* developed by the Ministry of Water and Irrigation and *Rules to Govern Water Resource Management in Kenya* developed by the Water Resources Management Authority (WRMA). Both instruments have been subjected to public scrutiny and are now awaiting be gazettement. The strategy provides a clear roadmap for managing the limited water resources in a manner that is sustainable.

The rules which will be enforced by the Water Resources Management Authority comes with a raft of friendly rules that will benefit domestic and commercial water users, users and investors among others.

Catchment protection

It is however on environmental protection that the rules are tough especially on those that have caused devastation on sources of water. Catchment protection will now get the force of law. Once the new rules are in place, persistent polluters will either be prosecuted with hefty penalties or required to clean up the polluted waters. Currently, a polluter can deliberately discharge waste into a river and wait for any aggrieved party to take him to court (where the fine is like a slap on the wrist).

The new rules offer control of any activities that cause over-exploitation and pollution of water bodies. Any threatened water catchment will be considered for gazzettelement as protected areas to keep violators away. The queue is long for water bodies and forest catchments that are in critical need of protection. Lakes Victoria, Nakuru, Naivasha, Bogoria etc and the water towers of Mau forest and Mt. Kenya are cases that require serious concern. These water sources cannot wait for the new rules to take effect. It is perhaps in these areas where the success of the new rules will have the greatest impact.