

Constraints and opportunities for participatory water management at the example of rural fisheries in Ghana

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Introduction

To counteract low water productivity in the Ghanaian rural water sector, donors promote community-based management. Institutions are decentralized, and management tasks are transferred to communities, water user associations and private-sector entities, since the early 1990s. While assigning ownership and responsibilities to communities is feasible, policy makers and practitioners often ignore antagonisms of historically derived and contemporary water management structures. Management is thus prone to failure.



Traditional authority of Dasabilgo

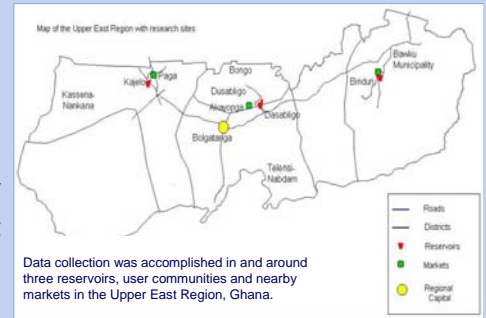


Community meeting in Dasabilgo

Methods

Historical parts of the study are based on literature.

Data on contemporary fisheries management are based on empirical data collected between February and August 2007, using expert interviews and several participatory appraisal tools (e.g. timelines and Net-Maps).



Data collection was accomplished in and around three reservoirs, user communities and nearby markets in the Upper East Region, Ghana.



Net-Map with legend in local language <http://netmap.wordpress.com/>



Timeline with retired fishermen in Kajalo.

History of water and fisheries governance in Ghana

Pre-Colonial times

Water governance was based on customary principles, emanating from different belief systems. Earth priests and chiefs were responsible for the enforcement of sanctions and taboos. Most sets of rules were rather complex and contested than homogenous and harmonic. Fishing was limited to a few months per year. However, some managerial rules existed, again based on traditional beliefs.



Traditional fishing gear for shallow waters

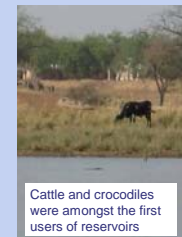
Under colonial rule

By 1901, all of the Gold Coast was British colony. Two key documents, Rivers and Forrest Ordinance (1903 and (1949), regulated water use e.g. fishing or irrigation. Due to empowerment of chiefs, the authority of priests faded. First reservoirs were built in the UER. Their use however remained limited due to missing fishing gear and skill.



Post independent developments

After independence (1957), institutions were established to regulate the water sector. However, colonial governing instruments like top-down, rural water governance structures and cooperation with chiefs were perpetuated, leading to resources conflicts. The newly established Department of Fisheries assumed management of the reservoirs and fishermen were trained to exploit aquatic resources. After drastic reduction of DOF staff, fisheries management collapsed.



Cattle and crocodiles were amongst the first users of reservoirs

Water and fisheries governance today

Decentralization is promoted by World Bank and IMF since the 1980s and started in Ghana under President Rawlings. Reform processes in the water sector started in the early 1990s. Responsibilities of reservoirs management were transferred to poorly prepared and equipped Water User and Fishermen Associations. Today's fisheries management is a potpourri of contradicting approaches. Responsibility is shifted between associations, Traditional leaders and extension staff, resulting in neglect and over-exploitation.



Group of fishermen in Binduri reservoir

Participatory development practices under review

- When management responsibilities for reservoirs were transferred to the communities, history and issues of power were ignored by those who developed participatory practices.
- Consequences are conflicts between different users, under-utilization of fish production potentials or abuse of water levies.
- Without assisting communities intensively, over long periods to build human and financial management capacities, they are overextended with administrative tasks and give up frustrated.
- Cooperation with the Ministry of Fisheries at regional and national level ensures, that research findings are transferred to provide options for the establishment of successful and adaptive co-management of fisheries for improved livelihoods.