



Tropentag, October 11-13, 2006, Bonn

“Prosperity and Poverty in a Globalised World—  
Challenges for Agricultural Research”

## Utilizing Social Capital to Minimize Conflicts in Natural Resource Management and Use in Rural Communities in Eastern and Central Africa

MICHAEL WAITHAKA<sup>1</sup>, ISAAC MINDE<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa (ASARECA), Uganda*

<sup>2</sup>*International Crops Research Institute for the Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Zimbabwe*

### Abstract

The use and management of natural resources in brittle ecosystems is susceptible to multiple forms of conflicts. This arises due to the fragile agro-ecological and social space characterised by the utilisation of natural resources for multiple purposes by multiple users which invoke complex and unequal relationships among a wide variety of social actors and stakeholders. Key players are pastoralists and sedentary farmers eking a living on fringes of national parks, forests and water bodies. Those areas have complex land tenure, ownership and use systems which raise conflicts between different communities. Conflicts lead to deforestation, destruction of crops, land degradation and displacement of people depriving many of their assets and livelihoods. The nexus between poverty, rural communities and natural resource management and use conflicts brings to the fore the fact that natural resources (land, water, forests) are the closest and weakest victims for the poor. Studies in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have addressed the nature, types and dimensions of natural resource management conflicts, and investigated mechanisms and procedures for minimising them. Measures to reduce conflicts suffer in the wake of lack of clear policy guidelines and weak institutional setups to enforce social order. Social capital is a potential least-cost means of addressing rural poverty which can be sustained at reasonable costs in a community. Lessons learned in building social capital in selected localities can be easily scaled up and out in other areas with minor adjustments based on existing economic, socio-cultural settings and agro-ecosystems. Efforts to minimise conflicts should revolve around the power and role of social capital in identifying, characterising and providing local solutions. Such efforts should strengthen processes of negotiation and encourage collective action to community conservation to address degradation. They should consider adjustment of customary norms and rules of land holding and access as opposed to outright replacement of customary tenure. They should put emphasis on use rights as opposed to ownership in order to secure rights access for the poor. For the marginalised poor, public investments in provision of water, health and education facilities are required.

**Keywords:** Conflict minimisation, east Africa , natural resource management, social capital