



## About Watershed

Watershed empowering citizens programme is a strategic partnership between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo.

Watershed aims at delivering improvements in the governance and management of water, sanitation and hygiene services as well as of the water resources on which they draw.

Watershed is implemented in Kenya, Uganda, Mali, Ghana, Bangladesh and India.

The long-term objective of Watershed is improved governance for WASH and IWRM so that all citizens, including the most marginalised, can benefit from sustainable services.

The immediate goal is to enhance citizens' ability to obtain information so that civil society organisations (CSOs) can advocate for change based on reliable, accurate data.

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# Saving the Mount Kenya Moorland

## Executive Summary

The Mount Kenya Ewaso Water Partnership (MKEWP) partnered with the Mount Kenya Trust to survey water abstraction in the northern moorlands of Mt. Kenya. This was under the MKEWP strategic objective of improving water security governance and as a result of a clash between two water users (upstream and downstream) in Laikipia County. The survey was conducted to look at compliance and how water abstraction is affecting the mountain. The survey revealed numerous illegal water intakes constructed along streams. The increased human activities in the area disrupt the moorland ecosystem hence affecting climate regulation, mitigating floods, conservation of biological diversity, nutrients cycling and soil formation among other benefits that result from the water towers.

## Background and Introduction

In 2017, Laikipia County experienced one of the worst water conflicts ever experienced in the region. Downstream water users (mostly pastoralists) from Ewaso Basin began what would become the genesis of a revelation on the destruction of one of the country's most important water towers.

## Briefing Note

The lack of access to water because of low water levels or none at all for the communities living downstream, made it difficult for them to sustain their livestock and other domestic water needs. This triggered them into take action as they opted to find out what the main cause of water scarcity was. The assumption by the downstream users was that upstream users who “allegedly” comprise of ranchers, Mount Kenya growers, small scale farmers, and elite members of the community (the political class) were engaged in illegal abstraction and diversion of water from the Mountain.

The high level of anger and animosity due to the scarcity of water eventually catapulted into a serious clash between these two water users (upstream and downstream). Recognising that failure to secure the supply of water causes conflict and reduces the security of livelihoods and agricultural production, the [Mount Kenya Ewaso Water Partnership](#) (MKEWP) partnered with the [Mount Kenya Trust](#) to survey water abstraction in the northern moorlands of [Mt. Kenya](#). This was to find a solution to the problem.

The survey was conducted to look at compliance and how water abstraction is affecting the mountain. The trip to the mountain revealed the discouraging state of affairs on water resource management in the most critical water tower in Kenya. The moorland, which falls under the supervision of [Kenya Forest Service](#) and [Kenya Wildlife Service](#) on [Mt. Kenya](#) has witnessed increased human activity evident from numerous illegal water intakes constructed along the streams.

## Findings

12 water intakes in a radius area of about 10 km were found during the survey. They sit between 3200 to 4000 metres above sea level. The highest water intake recorded during the survey was at 3987 metres above sea level – an indication that water users are going higher and higher up the mountain to abstract water. Other key findings

included the construction of several water intakes too close to each other in the same stream. In one of the rivers, three intakes had been constructed within a two hundred metre stretch. Moreover, the designs of these intakes do not allow mandatory environmental flows downstream.

Springs and tarns are the major sources of water at the moorland. The numerous intakes served as a threat to the existence of the tarns. They impact the ecosystem, the integrity of the watershed, and impact tourism and landscapes. Furthermore, the moorland was littered with plastic from water abstraction activities and routine maintenance. The intakes were connected to pipelines that snake their way down the terrain to serve the needs of users downstream in areas of Timau Sub-Catchment, and impact residents of [Meru](#), [Laikipia](#) and [Isiolo](#) counties. Water abstraction in the moorland puts pressure on the catchment and is not sustainable in the long run, says the Mount Kenya Ewaso Water Partnership Coordinator, Stanley Kirimi.

Indeed, Mt Kenya is the most significant water tower as a source of two of six water basins in the country. The Coordinator adds, "There is a need to contain the situation, rationalize the offtake of water, and to adopt common intakes for effective water resource management." "Common intakes allow users to share the resource equitably, and allow the recommended 30% of the river to flow downstream as ‘environmental flow’." This is a requirement of the Water laws. All the illegal intakes fall within Meru County boundaries and are subject to the authority of the Regional Water Resource Authority in Nanyuki.

The disclosure of this illegal activity eventually caught the attention of government agencies namely; Kenya Water Towers, County Government, Water Resources Authority, Kenya Wildlife Services and Kenya Forest Services, who acknowledged that the main cause of the problem is that nobody is really in charge of ensuring that the moorland is protected.

## Briefing Note

### Conclusion

Our plea is that the government should decide on whose mandate it is to protect the moorlands. It is important to highlight that Kenya's water towers are important because they collect rainwater, regulate river flows and prevent runoff, recharge groundwater aquifers, improve soil fertility, reduce soil erosion and sediment loads in river water, regulate local climatic conditions for commercial

agriculture, and act as carbon reservoirs and sinks. In addition, these catchment areas are instrumental in climate regulation, mitigating floods, conservation of biological diversity, nutrients cycling and soil formation.

**Below is a link to the documentary highlighting the issue.**

[Illegal Water abstraction impacts Mt. Kenya](#)

