



Department of Sociology
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

DISSERTATION DEFENSE

Community-Based Environmental Governance in West Pokot County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: Like many countries in the Global South, Kenya has decentralized its environmental governance models, displacing the power to manage forests and water from national environmental agencies to counties and communities. This change aligns with a global trend towards community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). CBNRM is a policy that advocates decentralized natural resource management based on the assumption that it is in a community's best interest to manage local common pool resources in the most environmentally sustainable, economical, and equitable way possible. Despite the policy's popularity, scholars suggest that communities are not engaging with CBNRM programs as theory predicts. To better understand the discordance between theory and practice, this dissertation draws on feminist epistemology and methodology to conduct interviews and focus groups that capture many diverse perspectives on CBNRM in West Pokot County, Kenya. Using a grounded theory method of analysis rooted in the participants' own words, the dissertation challenges assumptions about traditional ecological knowledge, rational interests, and empowerment that accompany CBNRM policy.

Committee: Stephen Gasteyer, Maria Isabel Espinoza, Robby Richardson, Jennifer Carrera (chair)

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