

# SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION: MWETHYA GROUPS IN KENYA

**T**he Katheka soil and water conservation project is an example of a women's initiative to combat accelerated resource degradation. In this dry area, the terrain is rugged and difficult to work. The people lack access to basic services such as water and electricity. Although resource degradation began in the 1920s, it was in the 1970s that overgrazing caused massive soil erosion, putting lives at risk by declining food production.

Twice a week members of the 15 'Mwethya' groups go to work on one member's farm and once a week they carry out communal projects such as the construction of gabions or the rehabilitation of dams, or the maintenance of terraces to prevent land degradation. Each group repairs 1,500-4,000 meters of bench terrace a year. Another activity is water conservation, which has led to improved crop yields; tree planting is increasing. The women have also embarked on income generating activities such as basket weaving and brick making.

This success has been achieved without much external support and the technologies employed have been simple and maintained by local artisans. Recently the community has organized to resist an external threat from contractors mining sand from the river bed - which interferes with local water resources.

---

Source: *Link in*, January-March 1992, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HX, U.K.

