

Article

Multi-Stakeholder Platform in Water Resources Management: A Critical Analysis of Stakeholders' Participation for Sustainable Water Resources

Onesmo Z. Sigalla ^{1,2,*} , Madaka Tumbo ³  and Jane Joseph ¹

¹ Water Right (T) Ltd., 109 Regent Estate, Mikocheni, Dar es Salaam P.O. Box 8703, Tanzania; janejoseph83@gmail.com

² Nelson Mandela—African Institution of Science and Technology, Arusha P.O. Box 447, Tanzania

³ Ministry of Water, Water Resources Institute, Dar es Salaam P.O. Box 35059, Tanzania; madaka.tumbo@gmail.com

* Correspondence: onesigalla@gmail.com; Tel.: +255-(754/713)-535-997

Abstract: Multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) have gained momentum in addressing contentious and cross-sectoral aspects of natural resources management. They have helped to enhance cross-learning and the inclusion of marginalized groups. Tanzania's water resources management sub-sector has championed these platforms as a means of breaking silos around planning, coordination, and resource mobilization. However, it is not uncommon to experience the occasional dominance of some influential sectors or groups due to their resources contribution to the process, contemporary influence, or statutory authority. Between 2013 and 2020, Tanzania has pioneered the establishment of MSPs at a national level and across the river and lake basins. This paper examines the representation of stakeholder groups in these platforms. Additionally, it establishes the baseline information that contributes to unlocking the current project-based platform design characterized by inherent limitations to potential changes in stakeholders' attitudes and actions. The research analyzed stakeholder's views, their representation, and the local and international literature to formulate opinions. Findings indicated that gender equality had not been adhered to despite being in the guidelines for establishing MSPs. The balance of public, private, and civil society organizations (CSOs) is acutely dominated by the public sector organizations, especially water-related ones. Finally, participation on the decision-making level is minimal, causing unsustainable platforms unless development partners continue to support operational costs.

Keywords: MSP; representation; stakeholders; stakeholders' engagement; water governance; pluralistic approach



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1. Introduction

Integrating diverse stakeholders in water resources management has been an essential part of sustainable water resources management. However, complexities that arise in the dynamism inherent in the human–water interactions are shaped by growth in population and urbanization, which modify the demand for water resources [1–3]. In addition, the use and management of water resources depend on economic growth, urbanization, land-use change, hydrological–climatic changes, technological advances, historical perspectives, politics, and complex, traditional practices based on religious and cultural beliefs and attitudes [4]. Water-related problems are, thus, interlinked and solvable only by interactions among diverse scientific disciplines and stakeholders in the auspice of integrated water resources management (IWRM), as is aided partly by implementing multi-stakeholder platforms [4,5].

Since the early 2000s, the concept of multi-stakeholder platforms (MSP) has gained traction in several sectors [6,7]. The concept adapts different names across sectors includ-

ing multi-stakeholder forums, multi-stakeholder processes or partnerships, and multi-stakeholder initiatives. Essentially, this concept entails collective (sometimes “collaborative”) governance, an innovative and solutions-oriented model focusing on public value. This is where diverse stakeholders can collaborate to improve public resources and deliver services [8–12]. The critical tenet of these platforms lies in bringing together government, civil society, and the private sector to address complex development challenges that no one party alone has the capacity, resources, and know-how to do so more effectively [13,14]. In addition, the uniqueness of platform is in learning by doing: using feedback mechanisms from the environment (biophysical and social) to shape policy, followed by further systematic experimentation, in a never-ending cycle [15,16]. In so doing, MSPs come to complement and not usurp the role of governments in achieving these ends. In water resources management, it comes as a logical companion to implement IWRM [6,17], which was introduced as part of Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 [18]. IWRM has been broadly defined as a process that promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land, and related resources in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems [19]. It is based on the three principles: social equity, economic efficiency, and environmental sustainability [20].

In this regard, IWRM and MSP help to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda, which requires multiple sectors and actors to work together seamlessly. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 explicitly recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies, and financial resources to support countries’ SDG commitments [21]. Further, SDG 17 seeks to encourage and promote effective public–private–civil society partnerships, building and capitalizing on their respective capacities and experience in resource mobilization and management. This provides an enabling function for the implementation of SDG 6 on water and sanitation, especially SDG 6.5 on water resources management and in the context of achieving water security for all [21]. In addition, when well-designed, these platforms may also help to achieve SDG 5 on gender equity and empowering of women and girls [21], the IWRM principle on social equity, the Dublin Statement on the role of women [22], and adherence to national water policy and legislation on the one-third gender principle in representation bodies [23,24]. However, experience shows that female participation remains limited, while general representative members in statutory bodies, i.e., catchment water committees and basin/national water boards, are limited to five and ten seats, respectively (Figure 1). MSP then expands the mechanism for broader stakeholder engagement, which helps to achieve adaptive management that features stakeholder input and knowledge generation, objective setting, management planning, monitoring implementation, and incremental plan adjustment in the face of uncertainty [9–12].

This paper examines sectoral representation and the inherent opportunities and barriers of the existing state of affairs. In addition, it establishes the baseline of the level of representation and its issues in these nascent stages of MSP evolution in Tanzania. In this regard, we address the following objectives in this paper:

- (a) to assess the level of adherence to the one-third gender rule for all water-related institutions of representation as proposed in the water policy and legislation in Tanzania;
- (b) to examine the balance of participation between different groups of stakeholders as envisaged in SDG 17 and government MSP regulations; and
- (c) to evaluate the role of participation of the managerial level in the mainstreaming of MSP undertakings to respective partners.

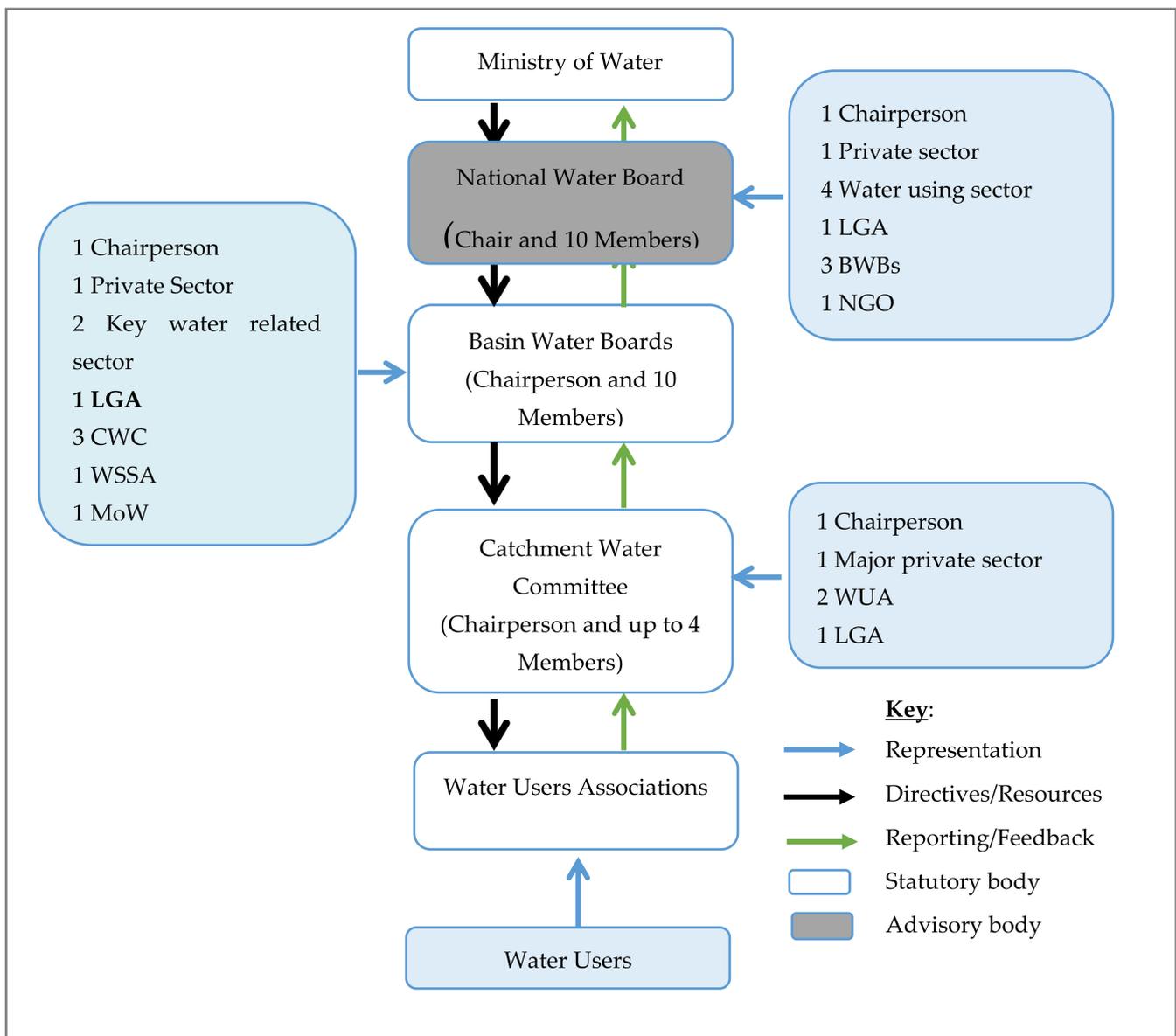


Figure 1. Institutional hierarchy for water resources management in Tanzania—modified after the national water sector development strategy. Adapted from Ref. [25]. (LGA—local government authorities, MoW—Ministry of Water, NGO—non-governmental organizations).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Study Site

The MSPs in Tanzania are operationalized at the national, basin, and catchment levels. In the context of this paper, we selected two national- and basin-level MSPs for the analysis. The selected basins were Lake Rukwa and Lake Nyasa basins, as seen in Figure 2. These constitute most of Tanzania's southwestern highland block, which is famous as a critical food basket. The two basin MSPs are similar in that both are dominated by agrarian economies, contain mining hotspots and national parks, and are transboundary and influenced by the fast-growing city of Mbeya and the borders of Malawi and Zambia, with potential for unsustainable development if not well guided, as discussed in [26]. The case study MSPs were selected to compare and contrast participation issues and experiences at the national and sub-national or basin level. In addition, we studied the same between infant basin form (that have started as recent as 2019) and the relatively experienced national platform. The national platform has been formally in existence since

2017, so it is expected to have gathered substantial insights. The same is then expected to have been percolated to the basin or sub-national levels.

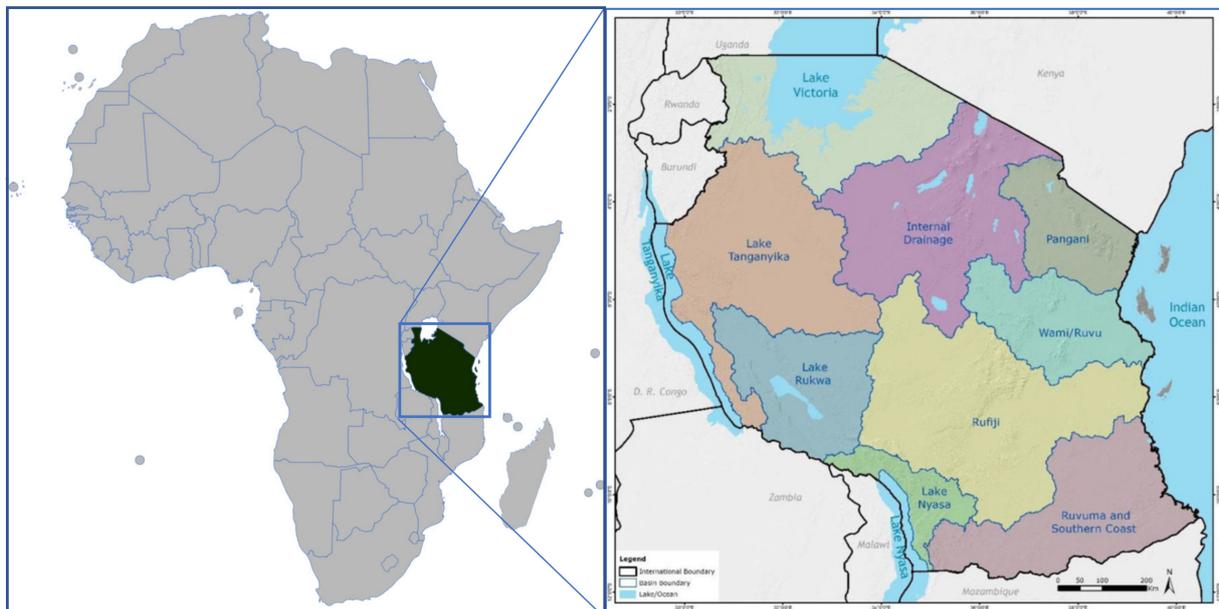


Figure 2. Jurisdiction of the selected multi-stakeholder platform—extracted from the national water atlas. Adapted from Ref. [27].

2.2. Data Collection

2.2.1. Literature Review

A review of national and international frameworks and literature supporting stakeholders' engagement in water resources management was performed. This benefited from open access electronic databases such as the Ministry of Water webpage, the World Bank Open Knowledge Repository (OKR), the 2030 Water Resources Group Repository, the Global Water Partnership Digital Library, and other internet searches. These were either by navigating through respective web pages or using search phrases on the subject matter in different search engines such as Google Scholar. A literature review was carried out to understand the subject matter and helped to augment and triangulate information gathered during focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

Table 1 below summarizes information used, such as national and international commitments and guidelines in specific aspects, e.g., affirmative action on gender balance, extracted from relevant strategic documents. Others included broadly agreed definitions and principles for different concepts, e.g., the IWRM and MSP, which were also crafted from the review of international frameworks. This also included a reference of what is considered a multi-stakeholder partnership, which in SDG 17 entailed a public–private–civil society partnership. Subsequently, the collected documents were filtered to get the following groups of required areas of this paper:

- widely accepted definition of concepts, i.e., IWRM and MSP;
- principles governing these concepts;
- national and international commitments, e.g., gender parity; and
- relevant experiences elsewhere that relate to these focus concepts.

2.2.2. Key Informant Interviews

Discussions with different stakeholders and forum secretariat have been conducted since early 2019 (Table 2). Questionnaires were drafted and used as a guide to collect data on representation, respective sectors, and the level of decision-making. The interviews engaged basin water officers, environmental experts from riparian administrative regions and districts, basin and national water board members, private sector members, civil society

organizations, and the community through water users' associations, WUAs, and irrigation associations. These were purposefully sampled to capture individuals with knowledge and experience in water resources management, MSPs, and active engagement in the MSP deliberation process. Interviews were conducted in Swahili and English depending on interviewee preference. Responses were captured in questionnaire forms and additional explanations; key quotes and a general understanding of the responses were transcribed in notebooks.

Table 1. Description of some of the key national and international frameworks considered.

S/N	Description of Framework/Literature	Information Extracted	Source
1.0. National Frameworks			
1.1	National water policy of 2002	Role of stakeholders in water resources management, one-third gender principle	[23]
1.2	National water sector development strategy of 2006	Institutional framework for WRM	[25]
1.3	Water resources management act 2009	Provisions for implementation of water policy	[24]
1.4	Regulations on Multi Stakeholders Forum Gazette Notice No. 56 of 2021	Provisions for formal recognition of national and basin platforms	[28]
1.5	Basin platform proceedings report (national and basin level)	Respective working groups identified WRM issues and implementation strategies	[29,30]
2.0. International Frameworks			
2.1	UN 2030 Agenda	SDG 5 on women and girls, SDG 6.5 on Water resources management, and SDG 17 on partnerships	[21]
2.2	UNCED Agenda 21	IWRM framework	[18]
2.4	Dublin Statement	Role of women in IWRM	[22]
2.5	Multi-Stakeholder Platforms	MSP evolution, composition, and implementation in Tanzania and globally	[31]

Table 2. Key informant respondents and type of data collected.

S/N	KII Respondent	Department/Section/Focus	Respondents	Key Information Gathered
1	Lake Rukwa Basin Water Board	Stakeholders engagement	2	platform proceedings reports, enabling statutory environment, sources of investment for MSP, uptake by stakeholders, emerging benefits of MSPs
2	Lake Nyasa Basin Water Board	Stakeholders engagement	1	
3	Ministry of Water	Division of water resources	1	
4	Water Users Association	Association leaders	4	Emerging benefits of MSPs
5	Civil Society	Advocacy, technical support	4	Uptake of MSP deliberations, sustainability issues
6	Private Sector	Beverage, agribusiness, and water bottling	4	Opportunities to influence policy and reputational risks
7	Development Partners	Natural resources management	2	Sustainable financing collaborations, e.g., with the private sector
8	Total		18	

2.2.3. Focused Group Discussions

The focus group discussions were conducted during the occasion of the respective platforms. The discussions involved twelve (12) working groups and helped to identify water resources management issues in the respective platforms, as summarized in Table 3. The groups involved between 7 to 15 members in each working group. Information gathered during discussions included water resources management issues that the working group seeks to address, respective drivers, strategies, and potential barriers at the implementation and strategic level. The groups also provided recommendations of measures to be taken to address water resources management challenges.

Table 3. Working group participants in the three platforms of interest.

Platform Description	Working Group	No. of Participants (Only Elected Group Members)
Lake Rukwa Basin Multi-Stakeholders Forum on Water Resources Management	Agriculture	15
	Environmental management	13
	Water supply	14
	Mining	8
Lake Nyasa Basin Multi-Stakeholders Forum on Water Resources Management	Agriculture	14
	Environmental management	15
	Water supply	12
National Multi-Stakeholders Forum on Water Resources Management	Mining	7
	Private sector (beverages, mining, and textiles)	9
	Knowledge management (research, policy, and practice)	13
	Resources mobilization (irrigation finance initiative and national water fund)	13

2.3. Data Analysis

Primary data collected from this study were descriptively analyzed using MS Excel software. Secondary data and literature reviews were synthesized and analyzed empirically. Both results were presented in tables, figures, or pie charts that offered a better way to compare and contrast results. Additional information was captured in the form of quotations from key informants. Finally, results were presented under three themes, namely (i) gender balance, which aimed at evaluating the level of adherence to or departure to national and international guidelines on gender; (ii) the balance of participation of sectors, which assessed the participation split from the public sector, private sector, and civil society; and (iii) the uptake of MSP deliberations, which aimed at assessing the uptake of MSP deliberations by the respective stakeholders.

3. Results

3.1. Identified Participants and Categories

Tables 4–6 below present different participant categories from the three platforms assessed in the current study. These are from the most recent MSPs at the Lake Rukwa platform attended by 83 participants, the Lake Nyasa platform attended by 63 participants, and the national platform with 150 attendees. For the purpose of this study, participants were further disaggregated by gender, hosting sector, and respective level of authority. In addition to these tables, responses from stakeholders are included in a narrative with insert quotations emphasizing results. Subsequent subsections present assessment results in three categories that capture the study objectives, i.e., the level of adherence to gender balance,

the balance of participation between sectors, and mainstreaming MSP undertakings by participating sectors.

Table 4. Stakeholder participation data for Lake Rukwa basin platform indicating gender and authority levels (Source: Field data 2021).

Sector	Male	Female	Total	Mngmt.	Technical	Assistant Tech	Support
Community institutions	13	5	18	17	1	0	0
Civil society organizations	6	0	6	5	0	1	0
Ministry of Water	0	3	3	1	2	0	0
Ministry of Water implementing agency	18	6	24	6	9	7	2
Other public sector institutions	24	5	29	4	17	5	3
Private sector	3	0	3	0	3	0	0
Total 3	64	19	83	33	32	13	5

Table 5. Stakeholder participation data for Lake Nyasa Basin platform indicating gender and authority levels (Source: Field data 2021).

Sector	Male	Female	Total 1	Mngmt	Technical	Assistant Tech	Support
Community institutions	3	0	3	3	0	0	0
NGO/CSO	3	0	3	3	0	0	0
Ministry of Water	3	1	4	1	1	1	1
Ministry of Water implementing agency	23	11	34	5	19	2	7
Other public sector institutions	12	3	15	1	10	2	3
Private sector	2	2	4	1	3	0	0
Total 3	46	17	63	14	33	5	11

(NGO—non-governmental organizations; CSO—civil society organizations).

Table 6. Stakeholder participation data for the national platform, including virtual and physical participation (Source: Field data 2021).

Sector	Physical F	Physical M	Virtual F	Virtual M	Total
Ministry of Water	9	18	1	1	29
Ministry of Water IA	2	12	3	11	28
Public	5	11	2	12	30
Private	6	12	3	8	29
NGO/CSO	1	7	1	5	14
Development partners	5	4	5	6	20
Total	28	64	15	43	150

(NGO—non-governmental organizations; CSO—civil society organizations).

3.2. Identified Key Issues

The national- and basin-level platforms discussed a number of issues that they uniquely intend to address (Table 7). While it is not the intention of this study to analyze these issues, their interlinking and cross-sectoral nature helped to inform our opinions. This is in the context of (a) the unique role that women can play, (b) the different mandates and knowledge that sectors of interest have (the current study considers the public sector, private sector, and civil society, as per SDG 17), and (c) the potential that an appropriate mix of community members, technocrats, and decision/policy makers can bring in addressing these identified issues.

Table 7. Key issues identified by basin- and national-level platforms.

Platform Description	Working Group	Key Issues of Focus
Lake Rukwa Basin Multi Stakeholders Forum on Water Resources Management	Agriculture	Poor water use efficiency and poor productivity
	Environmental management	Inadequate law enforcement and coordination of actors
	Water supply	Limited access to clean and safe water
	Mining	Pollution of water sources
Lake Nyasa Basin Multi Stakeholders Forum on Water Resources Management	Agriculture	Poor water use efficiency, declining water flows, and illegal fishing
	Environmental management	Destruction of natural vegetation; siltation of water sources, and dwindling river flows
	Water supply	Insufficient non-Revenue water and declining water sources
	Mining	Deforestation and water pollution
National Multi Stakeholders Forum on Water Resources Management	Private sector (beverages, mining, and textiles)	Declining water availability
	Knowledge management (research, policy, and practice)	Limited dissemination of information
	Resources mobilization (irrigation finance initiative and national water fund)	Limited resources for WRM activities

The issues were captured during the development of the respective theory of change or work plans in [29,30], and they are also well-captured by other scholars, e.g., [23,32,33].

3.3. Adherence to Gender Balance

Based on the gender disaggregation of participants listed in the considered platforms, it was noted that none of the platforms adhered to the affirmative action embedded in national and international frameworks. While the Tanzania policy and legal framework for water resources management established a one-third gender rule in all representation institutions [23,24], the United Nations SDG 5 intends to improve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls [21]. Figure 3 illustrates this skewness in that Lake Rukwa had only 23% female participants, Lake Nyasa had 27%, and the national platform was attended by 29% female participants. This collaborated well with sentiments from female participants in Lake Nyasa Basin MSP who indicated that:

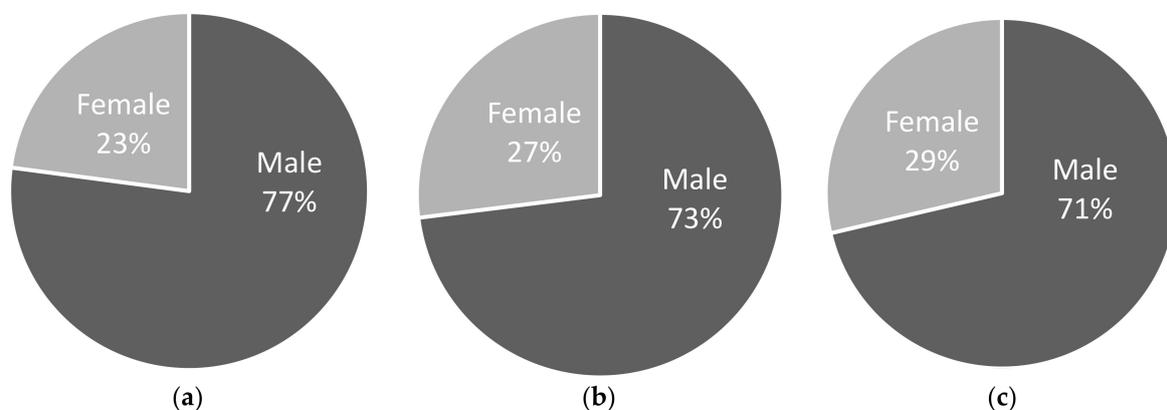


Figure 3. Percentage balance of gender in the participation of stakeholders in MSPs. (a) Lake Rukwa, (b) Lake Nyasa, and (c) the national platform.

“Whereas the Minister emphasizes the role of bureaucrats to off-shoulder water buckets from women, our voices are limited, starting with the way we take part in participation, discussions, and positions of leadership, which somehow owes to culture and numerous responsibilities in the homestead.” (Sentiments captured from one of the platform members in Lake Nyasa).

Although the composition of all the assessed platforms did not adhere to the one-third gender rule, as pointed out above, all platforms had a female member as a vice-chairperson. While efforts are needed to encourage the representation of females, their presence (employment) in participating organizations adds another complexity that might be beyond the influence of MSP coordinating entities. The 2014 Integrated Labor Force Survey (ILFS) indicates that females in Tanzania form a larger share of the working-age population but a smaller share of the economically active population. Women account for 52% of the working-age population (15 years and over), but the labor force participation rate is higher among males (89.4%) than among females (forming 84.2%) [34].

Further to the general analysis of gender balance above, the study aimed to assess the same balance across the vital MSP sectors, i.e., public sector, private sector, and civil society organizations or non-governmental organizations. The interpretation of Figure 4 shows that, across the board, female members were fewer (or none) compared to their male counterparts. In addition, Lake Nyasa had the fewest female members coming from community institutions, civil society, and the Ministry of Water.

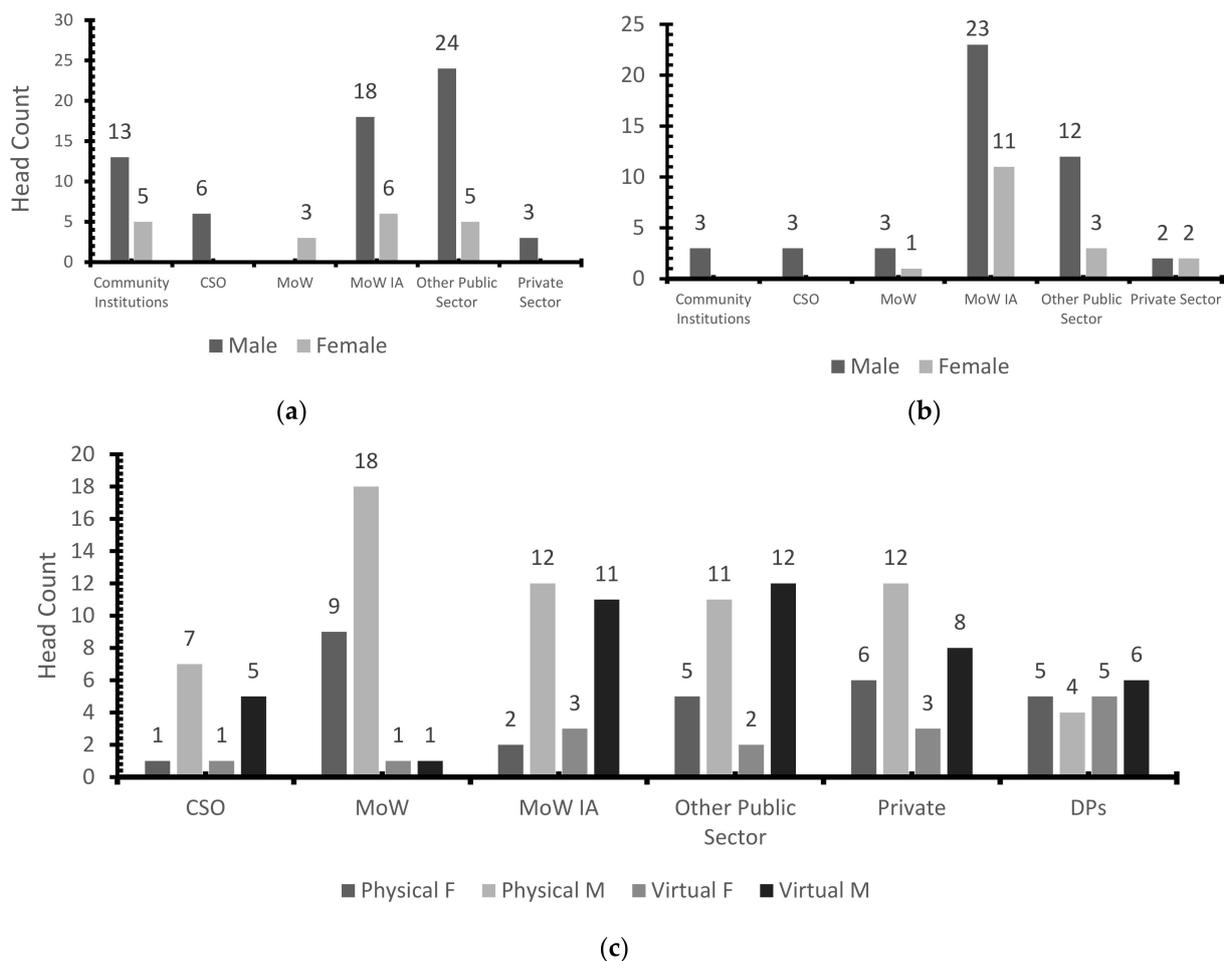


Figure 4. Gender disaggregation of participants at (a) Lake Rukwa, (b) Lake Nyasa, and (c) national platform. The national platform had a virtual participation facility as well.

3.4. Balance of Sector Representation

As observed in SDG 17 [21], the national water resources legislation [28] and initiatives such as the WWF water program [35] and 2030 water resources group [31,36,37], the public–private–CSO balance is paramount and must come equally for a robust platform. However, Figure 5 shows that sector participation is acutely skewed with the public sector being the dominant player at 67%, 84%, and 58% for Lake Rukwa, Lake Nyasa, and the national platform, respectively. Furthermore, the intended expansion of other sectors in WRM decision-making is undermined when the Ministry of Water and its implementing agencies form 32%, 60%, and 38% for the same stated forums. On the other hand, private sector and CSO participation are the narrowest, with the former standing at 4%, 6%, and 19% in the respective platforms. Similarly, the latter is 7%, 5%, and 10% for Lake Rukwa, Lake Nyasa, and National platforms, respectively. This state of affairs promotes a lack of hybrid sectors, which denies building more vital institutions and MSP sustainability. This was also observed by the chairperson of the national forum, who gave a narrative of the growing interest of the private sector in water resources management and these platforms in particular,

“I have worked in the sector for many years to a level of Permanent Secretary in the Ministry; we never used to have a push towards engaging the private sector. However, although slow, it is encouraging to see this shift where matters get to be discussed and picked up from here, which transforms platforms from merely talk shops to the actual workshop” (Observation of the chairperson of the national MSP).

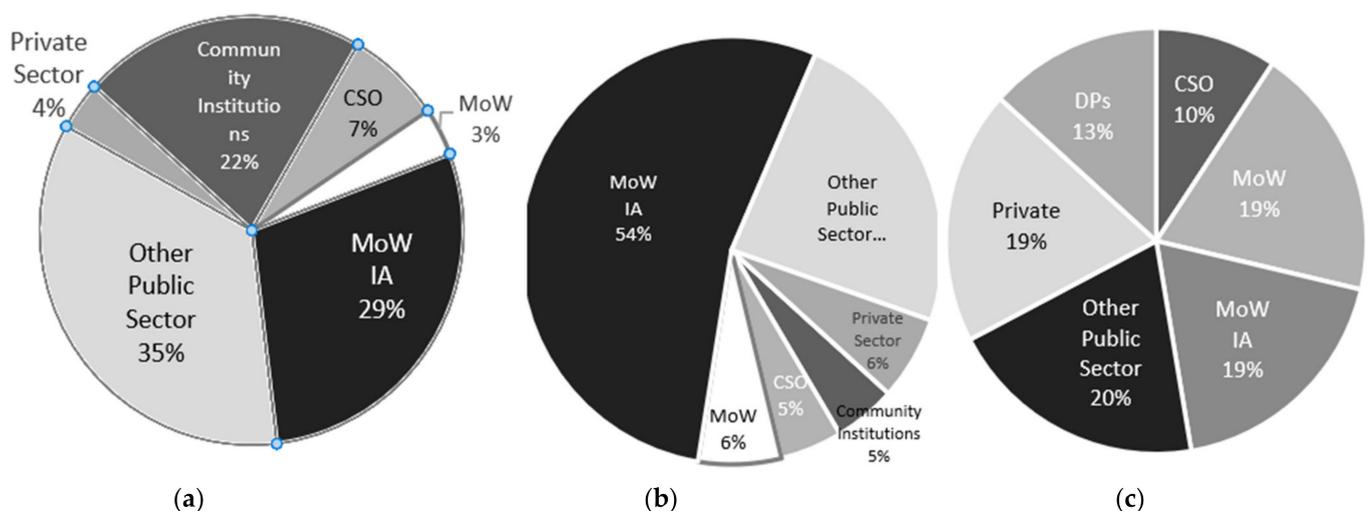


Figure 5. Percentage balance of sectors in (a) Lake Rukwa, (b) Lake Nyasa, and (c) the National Forum.

3.5. Sectoral Mainstreaming of MSP Undertakings

Engagement of strategic leadership is paramount in securing institutional commitments and conducive grounds for mainstreaming MSP undertakings [38,39]. While acknowledging the need for engaging those who do not hold (government) mandates, WWF stresses the need for engagement of strategic leadership, e.g., in the private sector in determining and committing to a shared water risk [40].

The current assessment considered the level of participation in Lake Rukwa and Lake Nyasa basin forums and compared it with experiences in the uptake of MSP deliberations in other basin forums across Tanzania. We found that there is a considerable constraint on the potential uptake of the MSP deliberations. Arguably, this is because of limited participation of strategic/decision-making levels in the MSPs, as illustrated in Figure 6b, and captured by one director of water resources below. Even in the Lake Rukwa forum, where up to 17 decision-making-level participants were captured, they belonged to the community

institutions cluster, i.e., water user associations (WUAs) and/or irrigation associations. As such, these groups may not have sufficient influence on policy compared to the participation of similar groups from the private sector or civil society organizations. Therefore, this potentially translates into limited strategic discussions and securing commitments from the respective partner institutions, which would help sustain the operationalization of these forums. This is related to three other issues: (i) over-reliance on the Ministry of Water or donor financing to operationalize MSPs, (b) lack of sector's own initiatives on WRM in subsequent MSPs, and (c) a general and consistent proposal for the need for fundraising strategy for all platforms, which are not in existence yet. Coupled with the fact that sectors other than the public sector (Section 3.4) are yet to be attracted adequately to these excellent platforms, the business-as-usual is likely to be perpetuated sustainably. The observation is informed by, among others, a lack of initiatives presented by participating sectors showing uptake from previous platform deliberations. The same was included in the challenge tabled by the Director of Water Resources during the opening of the national MSP:

“Among the top factors worrying sustainability of these MSP is not only recurrent financing of platforms by donor support but more of sectors picking deliberations, implementing them, and bringing back lessons. This will inform us in finetuning the enabling environment through informed advice to the Minister in charge of the water sector.”
(Observation by Director of Water Resources—Ministry of Water).

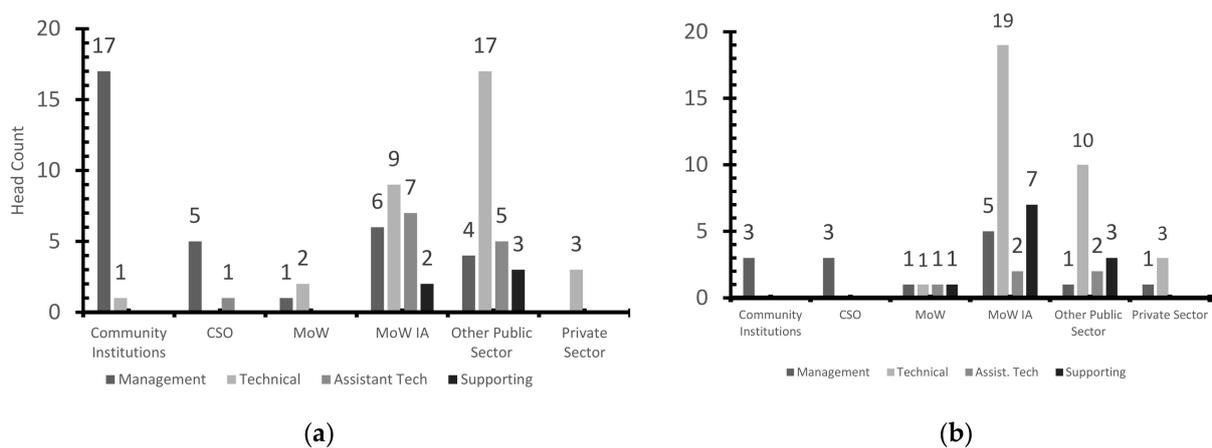


Figure 6. Participant disaggregation by the level of authority in respective hosting institutions: (a) Lake Rukwa and (b) Lake Nyasa.

The sentiments above entail the need for the engagement of decision makers from the represented sectors. Outstanding results have been shown by a leap in revenue by the Basin Water Boards when decision makers were engaged. Similarly, an engagement of media houses in the 2021 national MSP has recorded a positive response that needs follow-up to build momentum.

4. Discussions

Scholars have pointed out that gender-based roles frequently put women in direct contact with natural resources such as forests, water, land, and wildlife [41]. Women utilize and conserve these resources to supply basic needs for their families. Kariuki and Birner [42] add that the conservation of natural resources in rural areas cannot be achieved without the involvement and training of women. Therefore, women need not only to be able to fully participate in decision making but also to be enabled to engage in training relating to the management and sustainability of natural resources. The current study has indicated the limited representation of women and movements toward changing the status quo to increase their participation and inclusion of their knowledge, experience, and insights. That said, women's role in NRM is increasingly being recognized, as women

have considerable knowledge and experience gained from working closely with their environment. Further, their analytical skills in their community can play a vital role in the sustainable development of water and forest resources. However, both formal and informal organizational rules often exclude women from institutions involved in natural resource management [43]. Structural institutional barriers such as the hierarchical gendered division of labor within water institutions where women's roles are primarily administrative, non-decision-making, non-extension jobs also actively undermine women's participation. Women's participation is usually more successful in initiatives in which coming together creates enhanced resource rights or availability [44]. Although both the water policy of 2002 and the Water Resources Management Act of 2009 mention women and gender in their contents, both documents do not look at the design from a gender perspective. None of them give concrete guidelines or recommendations to make the policies more gender-inclusive. Multi-stakeholder platform coordination will have more informed deliberations if these important players are deliberately facilitated to participate. However, owing to the voluntary nature of participation in MSPs, the inclusion of female members has suffered significantly in the implementation of these platforms.

In relation to the balance of sectors for a robust MSP, the SDG 17.16 and 17.17 stipulate the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships that enhance collaborations between the public sector, private sector, and civil societies [21]. The expectation is that this diverse composition brings about a good blend of mandates, knowledge, experiences, and resources that match the cross-sectoral nature of natural resources challenges well [45]. For instance, the participation of the private sector has been well-captured in the current study as being among the reasons for constructive discussion and trust-building, leading to increased access to private media houses to communicate lessons and higher revenue collections for the Basin Water Boards. A leap from a few hundred to several thousand US\$ has been realized in some of the basins such as Lake Victoria and Wami-Ruvu, which forms a critical basis for learning. These benefits have been accrued in circumstances in which private sector participation is less than 10% in basin platforms and less than 20% in the national platform. One can only imagine the increased benefits if participation was well-balanced between the three sectors. This includes areas of resources mobilization, technology transfer, use of wide networks to communicate results, etc. The participation of the private sector is important as it provides mutual benefits in safeguarding its own investments while remaining a good corporate citizen [46,47].

In addition to securing the rightful place of women and girls in MSPs and the need for the right mix of different sector mandates, there is the challenge of linking with the correct authority level for a proper mainstreaming of MSP deliberation. MSPs were established to expand representation and democratize stakeholder participation in water resources management in support of Basin Water Boards (BWBs). Platforms may become an appropriate vehicle to foster cooperative governance between the BWBs, local government, private sector, and other stakeholder interest groups in the interest of integrated water resources management. However, limited participation of strategic level decision-makers from the represented sectors may contribute to limited uptake of MSP deliberations. This is because stakeholders involved in MSPs are numerous with overlapping roles and interests that create competition to establish supremacy and sometimes conflicts [7,48]. The problem is that, although stakeholders are concerned with water quality, quantity, and sustainability, they do not all have the same social position concerning measures proposed or taken to resolve the issues at hand. Moreover, they do not necessarily share the same view of what is desirable or what constitutes the purpose of water resources management [48]. How stakeholders act in relation to the rules and roles that have been taken or assigned to them will determine MSPs' successful implementation and sustainability. This gains more credit in a situation where the water sector is part of broader social, political, and economic development and is influenced by decisions taken by actors outside of the water sector [49]. Drawing lessons from numerous participatory water management initiatives, the authors argue that because of a lack of attention to the complex political contexts in

which these initiatives were embedded, the appropriate influence level of participating sectors was not well-represented [50]. These arguments agree with the results of this study, as most participation is at the technical level or below; hence, discussions tend to be largely technical in nature and lack strategic deliberations. For instance, the representing individual frequently lacks the appropriate authority and accountability to make a decision on mainstreaming deliberations from the MSP within their respective sector institution. This can be linked to the observation that a lack of self-championed activities results from missing decision makers. This means that the platform secretariat has to arrange for visits to solicit buy-in from decision makers, increasing the costs of implementing MSPs and undermining ownership.

Consequently, this state of affairs has seen a lack of self-championing of the agreed actions and an over-reliance on donor support to implement platforms. It is argued here that organizers should strive to unpack deliberations for ease of engaging with different levels of authority and seek to act strategically to ensure appropriate decisions and a commitment to MSP. Conroy and Peterson [51] propose a decision model that allows decision makers to develop portfolios of potential management alternatives for their investments, predict risk, estimate consequences, determine weights for objectives, and calculate overall support and trade-offs for each portfolio as well as identify the recommended decision. We argue that top leadership's complete buy-in and commitment to the respective sector is essential for sustainable mainstreaming of platform undertakings of work plans and the budgets of participating sectors.

5. Conclusions

In this study, a critical analysis of the stakeholders' participation and engagement in MSP and their impact on the integrated water resources management is performed. It has been established that none of the platforms achieved the one-third threshold set out in the local and international frameworks on the balance of gender in these representation bodies. In addition, we acknowledge the difficulties in bringing every sector around the table, but the present, skewed balance of sectors in all MSPs may undermine the intended expansion of sector representation in WRM decision-making. In this case, the private sector and civil society organizations are yet to fully participate, support even more, and reap the benefits of these platforms. On top of the limited participation of these sectors, the individuals who participate belong mainly to the technical segment, leaving the decision-making level. The absence of strategic level players impacts the mainstreaming of MSP deliberations in the participating sector and increases the over-reliance on donor support through the Ministry of Water.

The lack of involvement of various stakeholders in multi-stakeholder dialogues may prevent sustainable integrated water resources management at different scales. Furthermore, since dialogues that do not combine the ideas of multiple stakeholders are deficient in articulating the interests of the various stakeholders, the implementation of MSP action plans will be limited in scope. The limitation in MSP scope may create a misunderstanding between what is socioeconomically demanded and what is implemented on the ground at the basin or catchment scale. The policy implication of this study is that in order to have strong and sustainable MSPs for water resources management, both individual and institutional identities need to be well-represented. The role of women cannot be overemphasized in matters of WRM, as is the case for the knowledge, expertise, and resources that the private sector hosts and could bring to play in support of platforms.

Based on this understanding, the following recommendations are proposed:

- A deliberate effort to encourage female participation in the established MSP. The same can benefit from entrusting females with positions of leadership, as is the case for some of the platforms in Tanzania.
- The design of MSP meetings should consider and recognize the time constraints of participating sectors, organizations, and individuals. Moreover, identifying the shared

water risks in priority sites could be an excellent way to entice the participation of this private sector and others that feel a direct impact.

- The participation of decision makers is paramount to self-sustaining MSPs. A strategy for reaching out to top leadership in institutions may help to build interest. In addition, high-level steering committees are worth pursuing. Creating a private-sector-focused group could also help in panning out specific issues of interest and aiming at the participation of the management level, as was tested by 2030 WRG in initial engagement in Tanzania.
- Entrusting leadership roles to non-traditional participating sectors, e.g., the private sector, will increase trust, the sense of responsibility on WRM, and the potential for piggybacking on their networks to mobilize more players.

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