

# **Tracking institutional change of grassroots organizations in rural development: Enabling capacity development for natural resource management in eastern Africa**

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## **Abstract**

Rural institutions comprise of both formal (agreements, constitution) and informal rules (customs, traditions). They also encompass coalitions of people who share values, goals and perspectives and who are organized to protect and advance their own interests. Proper functioning and sustainability of rural institutions play a vital role in policy development, ensure eradication of poverty and improved food security. These rural institutions however change over time due to both internal and external factors, such as change in financial status, trade, leadership and better ideas that improve accrued benefits. Studies attest to the importance of capacity development for grassroots organizations. Moreover, creating a conducive environment for these organizations provide the necessary institutional infrastructure for growth. This notwithstanding, analyzing institutional change over time has mainly been subjective hence making it difficult to compare results. This study highlights the development of appropriate tools for mapping institutional changes over time. The maturity assessment tools evaluate smallholder groups' advancement processes and maps observed changes around a pre-defined standard of principles and a number of criteria which facilitate an index for the maturity of the groups as a surrogate measure of their capacity. Further, we will highlight test results of the developed tools after subjecting them to case studies of grassroots organizations in 6 districts in eastern Africa. The results demonstrate the efficacy of the tools in providing both empirical and qualitative data and factors of institutional change necessary for policy intervention in the study areas.

**Keywords:** maturity assessment, grassroots, rural institutions, maturity tool, capacity