Agricultural Land Use and Wetlands Conservation in the Lower Nyando River Basin, Western Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to determine the impact of agricultural activities on the Nyando river wetlands. It is one of the eleven major sub-basins of Lake Victoria. This is a lowland region about 1135metres above mean sea level. Over the years this region has tended to attract dense human settlement. The main occupation of majority of the people is small-scale agriculture. Other gainful employment opportunities are limited. Consequently, rural poverty embodied in lack of reliable source of income, low levels of agricultural production, unemployment and lack of infrastructural facilities characterize the region. Furthermore, wet seasons are associated with extensive flooding and sub-merged arable land; resulting in massive displacement of people and destruction of property. The dry season introduces increased problems of food and animal feed scarcity. The wetlands in the lowlands provide alternative sources of water for crop irrigation and animal grazing. Thus, these ecosystems are continually being encroached, drained cleared of vegetation and converted into crop farming and grazing areas. The conceptual framework of this study was informed by the political ecology theory. These studies attribute underdevelopment and food insecurity in the poor countries, to their interaction with the dominant development model of the present-day market economy. Hence, land use changes that are influenced by both the government policies and the market forces are discussed and their significance on wetland degradation underlined. Questionnaire, in-depth interviews and personal observations were the main methods of gathering primary data. Secondary data was obtained from published and unpublished public and private documents. Socio-economic data analysis was done using SPSS computer package.

Key words: Agriculture, Wetlands, Food security, Degradation, Competition, Wildlife, Poverty.