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**AWARENESS AND RESPONSE BY SMALLHOLDER
WOMEN FARMERS TO SOIL EROSION: A CASE
STUDY OF NJORO, KENYA.**

by

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Abstract

The debate on land degradation in Kenya is mainly concerned with management, or mismanagement of agricultural land given existing land tenure systems and population pressure. Soil erosion is a major land degradation concern on smallholder farms most of which are managed by women.

This study's broad objective was to assess smallholder women farmers awareness about soil erosion and analyse socio-economic factors, farm resources and farm management decisions that influence their response to soil erosion in Njoro division of Nakuru District. The specific objectives were: (a) to assess the extent to which smallholder women farmers are aware of soil erosion as a problem affecting farm productivity on their farms; (b) to identify the ways in which socio-economic factors (age, education and income), farm resources (farm size, family size and farming tools), farm management decisions and participation in group activities influence women farmers' response to soil erosion; (c) to identify soil conservation measures women opt for in dealing with soil erosion problems; and (d) suggest appropriate intervention measures that can be implemented to improve womens' contribution to soil conservation. The study hypothesised that there was no significant relationship between smallholder women farmers' response to soil erosion and their socio-economic factors, farm resources, farm management decisions and participation in group activities.

The study employed various techniques for gathering data. First, a sample of 100, consisting of 72 female and 28 male, respondents was interviewed using a questionnaire. The second method involved structured interview of eight key informants

while the third method involved discussions with groups of farmers. In addition, field observations of the main soil conservation structures and farm organisations were also done. Data was analysed using both descriptive (mean, variance, frequencies and standard deviation) and inferential (cross tabulation, correlation and regression analysis) statistics. Secondary data composed of documented information about the subject of women and their participation in agricultural development and specifically soil conservation.

The main findings of the study are threefold. First, women are aware of soil erosion as a serious environmental problem and associate soil erosion with decline in soil fertility and farm productivity. Second, awareness to soil erosion and experiences by women farmers influence their response to soil erosion problems. And third, socio-economic factors (education and income), farm resources (farm and family size) and farm decision-making as well as participation in work groups have important influence on womens' adoption of soil conservation measures.

Based on the study findings, three main areas of improving womens' contribution to soil conservation are recommended. First, soil conservation and rural afforestation programmes must address household preferences as well as women awareness and potential response in decision-making. Second, proper institutional and financial arrangements to encourage women farmers adopt more effective soil conservation measures will be important. Last, womens' participation in agricultural and rural development programmes and projects such as soil and water conservation should be recognised and improved by government, private sector and non-governmental organisations. Such initiatives can be channelled through women groups.

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