

Livelihoods in the wetlands of Kilombero Valley in Tanzania: Opportunities and challenges to integrated water resource management

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Abstract

Wetlands contribute in diverse ways to the livelihood of many people in Africa. One of the major constraints to the wise use of African wetlands is lack of knowledge by planners and natural resource managers on the benefits that they provide and techniques by which they can be utilised in a sustainable manner. This paper presents findings from a study undertaken in Kilombero Valley, Tanzania, on the dynamics and benefits of natural resource use in the wetlands. The paper specifically focuses on opportunities and challenges related to integrated water resource management. The study was conducted in two villages, Idete and Signali located in Kilombero District, Morogoro Region. Participatory assessment and household interviews were employed to obtain both qualitative and quantitative information, respectively, pertaining to biophysical, agronomic and socio-economic facts that influence community access to, and utilisation of the wetland resources.

The findings show that Kilombero Valley has high potential for a diversity of livelihood activities. The wetland also serves as a source of water for farming, livestock, fishing and for domestic uses. Over the last two decades the use of wetlands for agriculture has increased because of increasing population of both pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, and hence the resultant need to produce more food. However, there are environmental concerns associated with increasing use of wetlands for agriculture and other livelihood activities, including deforestation and trampling of soils by increasing livestock numbers, increased demand on the water resources and lack of elaborate institutional framework to facilitate the integration of the various sectoral and cross-sectoral uses of the wetland resources and among stakeholders. The main conclusion is that sustainable livelihood development of wetland communities requires multidisciplinary and integrated efforts in addressing constraints in the various sectors such as agriculture, natural vegetation use, water resources and fishing.

Keywords: Kilombero Valley wetlands; Livelihood opportunities; Agriculture; Natural resource use; Integrated water resource management; Poverty reduction