Population dynamics, rural livelihoods and environmental degradation: some experiences from Tanzania

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Abstract

Population growth and environmental degradation are closely linked. Increasing population has in many rural areas of Tanzania contributed to changes in land use/cover patterns, land fragmentation and livelihood insecurity. Increasing demand for food, energy and other environmental services has contributed to expansion of agriculture, including marginal areas, and deforestation often leading to environmental degradation. Increased reliance on natural resources for rural livelihoods, subsistence nature of the agricultural sector and limited economic opportunities in rural areas are among the factors leading to rural–rural and rural–urban migrations searching for better livelihood opportunities. The high urban demand for food and biomass energy from rural areas has also contributed to rural deforestation and overall environmental degradation. This paper addresses the linkages between population and environmental degradation in Tanzania. It argues that effective implementation of development and resources management policies can lead to environmental sustainability even with growing populations. It provides evidence from successful land management interventions such as HADO, HASHI and SECAP, which support the argument that with effective implementation of resource management initiatives even larger populations can be supported by the available resources. Such successful interventions ought to be emulated elsewhere with similar environmental problems.

Keywords: Population Rural livelihoods Environmental degradation Sustainable development Tanzania