ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS, PERCEPTION AND SOCIOECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF CHARCOAL PRODUCTION, MANAGEMENT AND UTILIZATION IN THE LAKE VICTORIA BASIN

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Abstract

Lake Victoria Basin (LVB) has become an area of research after dropping of water levels and other challenges emanating from use of the lake in the region. LVB's deforestation has also reduced productivity affecting fishery industry, increased water runoff that washes more silt into Lake Victoria. Initiatives and sensitizations on environment protection have been going on for more than 20 years now, but no positive changes have taken place. Improved cook stoves and introduction of electricity, gas and coal have not yet taken a significant portion of energy sources in Mwanza and Mara. This is partly influenced by low household income levels. Solar and wind power have not yet been exploited fully in the areas.

The study shows that charcoal production has not been perceived as destructive to environment for years until in the 1980s and 1990s when environmental programs were emphasized. The making of charcoal encroached forests those reducing adequate rains, rivers dry up reducing sufficient waters to fill Lake Victoria. The impact spilled to other areas of economy in particular agriculture that supports people lives. Awareness, perceptions and socio-economic implications to environment does not reflect well on charcoal production, marketing and use because actors were addressing poverty. Charcoal business contributes one fifth of house hold incomes. Charcoal making used traditional earth kilns that were inefficient to convert charcoal. Charcoal is illegal business in Mwanza and Mara and supposed to be regulated, however no or light enforcement practice was so widespread that the law virtually unenforceable. Unless an alternative business was found, people will continue producing charcoal.

The results imply that no comprehensive plans focusing on charcoal making, marketing and use put in place besides general statement made about the product. As a result LVB on Tanzanian side has become bare in terms of tree cover and natural vegetation. Forestation, agro-forestry and control of forest harvesting efforts have not stopped deforestation. Charcoal production and control are incoherent since selling at wholesaling, retail and use were legal (or accepted) but illegal at production and hauling it. Policies formulate stronger policies, directions and actions to LVB areas to protect rivers and the lake. Restoration of the LVB areas requires persistence, perseverance, commitment and constant communications that are persuasive to change and inspire people of Mwanza and Mara regions. Restoration of the old wetlands and forests need time to get vegetation growth and good cover.

Key words: Lake Victoria Basin environment, charcoal production and marketing, poverty and sustainable charcoaling.