

Environment and Poverty

Our livelihoods are directly linked to the environment and natural resources. The environment provides key inputs on which life depends. Dr. Samson Wasao and Alex Forbes of the Poverty and Environment Initiative examine in this article how the environment has a direct bearing on our lives and the fight against poverty in general.

The environment provides key regulating functions including watersheds which serve to purify water, control of water flow and the minimization of risks of flooding and the regulation of climatic conditions.

In addition key economic and enabling sectors of the Kenyan economy, namely agriculture, tourism and energy (collectively contributing approximately 46 percent of the Gross Domestic Product—GDP) are directly dependent on a healthy environment. Degradation of our environment through poor use of land, pollution and uncontrolled use threatens the ability of the environment to sustain the provision of these important benefits for rural and urban livelihoods and to the wider economy.

In response to these issues the Government of Kenya, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), initiated the Poverty and Environment Initiative (PEI). PEI aims to integrate environment into development policy, planning and budgeting processes. The Ministry of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030 leads the program in partnership with the Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources (MEMR) and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA).

To achieve its stated purpose of mainstreaming environment into the development policy, planning and budgeting process, the PEI is working to achieve the following outputs:

Poverty and environment linkages

Studies have been undertaken to assess poverty and environmental linkages at a broader political and economic level by drawing on past and current policy, program and institutional orientations and making recommendations on



Environmental degradation as seen in this picture can have adverse effects on livelihoods especially on the productivity of land.

improving these linkages.

Another study reports on community based consultative planning sessions to identify poverty and environmental challenges, causes and solutions in three PEI pilot districts (Bondo, Meru South and Murang'a North).

The two reports were a preparation of the PEI Briefing Note titled "Making the Connection: Economic Growth, Poverty and the Environment", which is a popular version of the studies aimed at government officials at national and district levels and civil society institutions.

Linkage between environment and natural resource management

A study was commissioned to determine whether or not improved management of environment and renewable natural resources (ENR) can form the basis for economic growth and poverty reduction policies.

The contribution of environment and renewable natural resources (ENRs) to economic growth and poverty reduction is widely appreciated but not sufficiently and routinely measured.

The study provides an economic assessment of the role of the environment and renewable natural resources in economic growth and poverty reduction in Kenya, and analyses the levels, trends and distribution of environmental expenditure and revenue in relation to the country's environmental priorities and poverty reduction strategies.

Key findings indicate that whilst the contribution of the environment to economic growth and poverty reduction is appreciated at certain levels, lack of environmental economic data prevents the benefits and costs associated with environmental services and assets which should be effectively incorporated in decision-making.

Pro-poor environment policies

PEI, in collaboration with the Danida/Sida Environment Program Support (EPS), is supporting the Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources with the preparation of an environment policy that strengthens action by government institutions and its partners toward sustainable development through the integration of environment into the development processes. Building on from past policy processes (E.g. The Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1999 on Environment and Development) and taking into consideration the Environment Management and Coordination Act (EMCA, 1999), the draft policy puts emphasis on the need for integrated planning and ecosystem management, responding to anticipated Climate Change impacts, and how sectors can address these issues. The environment policy process is led by 15 eminent Kenyans who form the Environment Policy National Steering Committee (NSC).