

## **Agricultural Land Management for Sustainable Development in Rural Kenya**

### **Abstract:**

Land is one of the most important natural resources for the creation of wealth in many societies. Its ownership and control brings economic power, which in turn, is often the basis for social and political power. Unlike other factors of production such as labour and capital, land is in fixed supply. Of the total land area of Kenya of 56.9 million hectares, more than 90 percent is agricultural land. Over 80 percent of this land is categorized as Arid and Semiarid land where about 25 percent of the total population resides and over 50 percent of the total livestock is produced. Only 17 percent of the total arable land is considered to be of medium to high potential areas. This is where about 75 percent of the total population is found as well as the remaining forests. About 80 percent of the total population lives in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. The objective of the paper is to review the existing policies, laws and regulations that guide the use and management of agricultural land clearly examining their effectiveness in enhancing sustainable rural development. Through a desk review of the multiple policies, laws and regulations that govern the utilization and management of agricultural land in Kenya, various problems were identified. The individualization of tenure through land registration has led to the subdivision of agricultural land to uneconomic units that are unsuitable for agricultural activities especially in pastoral areas. There is an absence of comprehensive and clear policies and laws on how to gain access to land for agricultural uses by the landless, who are mainly squatters on huge tracts of land owned by absentee landlords. This has led to conflicts and the degradation of agricultural land due to lack of effective integrated environmental management. The fragmented land management system has resulted into uncoordinated actions by the many actors. However, land registration resulting in the conversion of land into a commodity has enabled farmers' access credit all the security of registered title. This credit has led to improvement of land and soil conservation through the development of agro-forestry and other soil and water conservation measures. For agricultural land to continue playing the key roles of food production for the country's ever-increasing population, creating employment and contributing to the foreign exchange earning there is need to urgently implement the new land policy, review and consolidate the existing multiple policies, laws and regulations in order to enhance good management and use of agricultural land. Land carrying capacity determination must precede any subdivision of agricultural land activity. There is need to harmonize and coordinate the institutions and agencies that deal with agricultural land use management with an aim of improving the management and control of agricultural lands. A clear law that stipulates how to deal with absentee landlordism and neglected land must be put in place if soil erosion and degradation of such land is to be avoided.