

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

**EXPLORING THE LINKS BETWEEN INTENSIVE FARMING
AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN WUNDANYI
DIVISION, TAITA DISTRICT**

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for 78% of Taita- Taveta district's population, with 95% of the total labor force being engaged in agricultural production for their income. At the same time, 66% of the total district population lives in absolute poverty, the majority of who live in rural parts of the district and almost invariably rely on agriculture for their local livelihoods (GoK 2002:29). This underscores the potentially central role that appropriate management of the land, upon which most livelihoods depend, could play in the district's poverty reduction strategies. Promoting appropriate management of bioresources by the poor is therefore of central relevance to questions of poverty alleviation and policy in the district, as it is the case in most developing countries (Grimble and Laidlaw 2002:1-4). Loss of biodiversity-such as the loss of species or changes to habitats- can be bad for poor people, who mostly rely on these resources for direct food needs as well as indirectly making their livelihoods (CSM-BGBD 2006). In some circumstances, biodiversity loss means forfeiting the possibilities of drawing benefits therefrom in the future, i.e., sustainably. It is therefore important to understand the factors driving agricultural intensification in a given context and their implications for sustainability of livelihoods, so as to explore appropriate interventions.

This study sought to address three objectives, viz. to establish the types of intensive farming practices undertaken by the farmers; to find out the social, economic and institutional factors influencing agricultural intensification practices in the area; and explore the implications of intensive farming practices for the attainment of sustainable livelihoods. The main intensive farming practices undertaken by farmers include intercropping, crop rotation, crop-livestock integration and use of manure and fertilizers. The main factors influencing these practices were found to be environmental and market related vulnerabilities and low levels of social capital. The study proposes an institutional intervention in vegetable production so as to regulate vegetable production market, improve access to requisite inputs and empower farmers to improve their earnings. There is also need to design appropriate credit services that are sensitive to the particular risk-prone nature of vegetable production. Capacity building for social capital investment would also go a long way in empowering farmers to collectively leverage their interest in vegetable production.