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Local Communities’ Perceptions Towards Forest Management Regimes: Case of Kakamega Forest in Kenya

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Abstract

Kakamega Forest is located in western Kenya and covers approximately 240 Km². The forest is the only lowland tropical rainforest in Kenya and it is world famous for its diversity of unique and numerous flora and fauna. However its survival is under immense threat since it is located in a densely populated area where local communities depend heavily on agriculture and forest extraction for their livelihoods. Currently, the forest is divided into three different parts that are managed through three distinct management approaches: an incentive-based approach of the Forest department (FD), a protectionist approach of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and a quasi private- approach of a local church mission, the Quakers. A review of literature clearly indicates that forest management regimes of public forests are important in assigning property rights to the various stakeholders and guiding use and consequently the outcomes. On the same footing research has pointed out the centrality of the local communities in the process of natural resource management. The persistence of resource degradation problems and failure of technical simple technical or economic prescription clearly indicates that there is need to consider the more complex aspects of natural resource management. The perception of the local people towards management regimes and the factors that condition their perception is important in designing policies for sustainable use of natural resources. This study considers how the local communities perceive the management regimes in terms of meeting the goal of utilising and conserving forest biodiversity. Satisfaction ranking showed that the strictest regime among the three was ranked highest overall. Coincidentally, the highest ranked regime has the best performance among the three in conserving the forest in its pristine state. An ordered logit regression was used to analyse factors influencing the overall satisfaction ranking. The results indicate that socio-economic factors are not significant in explaining the level of satisfaction ranking but involvement in forest conservation activities appears important in explaining satisfaction ranking. The paper concludes by highlighting some policy implications of the results.

Keywords: Management Regime, Perception, Satisfaction ranking