

The Influence of Socio- economic Factors on Deforestation: A Case Study of the Bereku Forest Reserve in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT Deforestation in forest reserves which is mainly driven by socio-economic factors is considered as one of the key issues of the sustainable use and management of biodiversity. This paper analyses socio-economic factors influencing deforestation in the Bereku forest reserve in Tanzania. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and field observations. Descriptive and inferential methods were used to analyse and explain quantitative data while content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. The results revealed that livelihood activities, period of residence close to forest and distance from homestead to the forest significantly influence deforestation in the study area. In addition, farm land size, household size, education, awareness of the management of the reserve and its boundaries insignificantly influence deforestation. It was also revealed that the reserve fringe communities are aware of the negative consequences of deforestation and forest degradation. The paper concludes that the causes of deforestation in the Reserve are deeply rooted in the daily livelihood needs of communities and the growing population. Forestry education and extension services should be directed at institutional strengthening catalyzing local communities to actively participate in decision making processes aimed at conserving the forest and improving the livelihoods of rural communities.