

Chapter 7

National Environmental Policies in Tanzania Processes and Politics

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INTRODUCTION

Tanzania is faced with widespread environmental problems such as deforestation, soil erosion, pollution, the deterioration of aquatic systems, and a loss of biodiversity. Only about 22 per cent of Tanzania's land has medium to high fertility (United Nations Secretariat 1993). The rest of the land is not arable. This is largely because of unreliable rainfall, infertile soils and rampant pests and vermin. The areas with a high agricultural potential are often subjected to mechanized farming, primarily for the production of cash crops. The mosaics of traditional food crops and trees are being replaced by monocrops: biodiversity is thus declining and soil degradation increasing. Also, these areas with a high agricultural potential tend to support relatively high human population densities and growth rates. Consequently, there is not enough land for traditional shifting cultivation. Due to the continuous use of the land, the soil rapidly loses fertility, and productivity falls. The response to the land shortage is often encroachment onto public lands, including Protected Areas (PAs).

In the areas with medium and low agricultural potential, natural population growth is augmented by migration from the crowded high potential areas. To compensate for the low yields in these areas, farmers expand farmland into marginal areas. The latter areas, when devoid of natural vegetation cover, become susceptible to wind and water erosion.

Poorly conceptualized national policies such as the Villagization Programme (VP), the "farm or perish" campaigns, and the ongoing economic adjustment policies also contribute to environmental problems through excessive land use, soil erosion, declining productivity and further encroachment in marginal areas.

About 60 million hectares (or 50 per cent) of mainland Tanzania is potential grazing land. The current livestock population in Tanzania is about 12.5 million cattle and 9.5 million goats and sheep (FAO 1990) or 9.7 million Livestock Units (LU). This gives a density of about 0.16 LU per hectare. Because some of the potential grazing areas are infested with tsetse flies, or are protected for conservation and other purposes, livestock is concentrated in limited rangelands where stocking densities often exceed their carrying capacity (Mwalyosi, 1991). As a result, severe de-vegetation and a deterioration of range conditions has been reported for some areas (Mwalyosi 1992). Overstocking of some areas is due to the sedentarization of formerly nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoral people, the abolition of traditional land tenure systems, and the rapid growth of the human population.

Deforestation is largely caused by the expansion of cropland, bush fires and the cutting of trees for fuelwood, charcoal, building poles and commercial timber. Approximately 0.7 per cent of Tanzania's forest and woodland is cleared annually for agricultural purposes (McNeely et al., 1990). This rate is likely to be enhanced by the liberalization of external trade, particularly in timber and other forest products (Bagachwa et al. 1995). Deforestation due to the expansion of cropland is particularly severe in the coffee and cotton-growing regions (WRC, IUCN and UNEP, 1993; Munzava in Misana and Nyaki 1993) and regions settled by refugees from Rwanda and Burundi (Ketel 1994). Also, the coastal forests and thickets, once covering about 59,300 square kilometres, now occur as isolated patches, in some cases as small as 2 square kilometres (Mackinnon and Mackinnon 1986, Burgess and Muir 1994).

Tanzania has been called a "megadiversity" country due to the large number of species it has (McNeely et al. 1990, Stuart et al. 1990). However, the rapid and extensive deforestation going on in the country is threatening biodiversity. The major threat to wildlife biodiversity in Tanzania is human encroachment into the conservation areas and the poaching of species of commercial value. Thus, in some PAs, poaching has either eliminated entire wildlife populations or reduced them to very low levels (TWCN 1991).

A less dramatic but serious problem for the long-term survival of the majority of large mammals and carnivores in Tanzania, is the loss of critical habitats in areas outside or adjacent to the PAs, due to agricultural and