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“Competition for Resources in a Changing World:
New Drive for Rural Development”

A Sensitive Question : Biodiversity Conservation with the Local Population: a Case Study in Central Menabe, Madagascar

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Abstract

In Madagascar – a biodiversity hotspot of international importance – the villagers depend on the forest for energy, construction materials, foodstuff and medical plants. In addition, conversion of forest provides much needed land for agriculture. Most of the currently proposed management systems for the conservation of forests do not take into consideration villagers' needs. Indeed degradation and deforestation have continuously occurred in places where demand for land and forest products is high.

To protect the biodiversity, the Malagasy government wants to increase the area under protection from 1.7 mio ha to 6 mio ha. In this context it is vital to know how to balance the needs of villagers with the importance of biodiversity conservation. If current management practices continue, who will be winner of the competition between conservation issues and the local population's requirements for forest resources?

The research presented concentrates on the balance between forest-based livelihoods and biodiversity preservation by focusing on the main tree species used by the local households. An inventory of the tree resources was carried out for a total of 120 plots shared between 4 types of forest landscape. The aim has been to come to a specific understanding of stakeholder requirements and strategies in order to identify the needs of villagers with regard to tree resources and their ability to manage the forest resources. Data for the survey were obtained by means of 202 questionnaires made in 7 villages, 11 interviews with actors who use wood in their everyday activities, 12 interviews with members of forest managing associations in 5 villages, 6 interviews with societies that transform wood into furniture and 3 interviews with NGO's about conservation or development.

Keywords: Forest biodiversity, forest management, forest products, human-forest interface, Madagascar, land use balance