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## Land Degradation in Northern Ghana: Causes and Effects under High Population Pressure and Land Use Competitiveness

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### Abstract

The ability of agricultural production to guarantee food and income security in northern Ghana in the past few years has declined and become less sustainable. The decline is attributed to the depletion of land and water resources of many farm households in northern Ghana. The connection between land degradation and agricultural productivity is well understood. It is generally agreed that land degradation directly results in low productivity of land and water resources, and subsequently causes poverty and reduced standards of living among households. This effect becomes even more critical in agro-based regions like the northern Ghana where over 70 % of the population is directly engaged in agriculture. What causes land degradation in northern Ghana and what are the possible remedies for the phenomenon? Among farmers, researchers, governmental and non-governmental organisations, divergent views attribute the phenomenon to either the emergence of unfavourable climatic conditions in recent times globally, chronic poverty among farm households or their use of unsustainable farming practices. This paper is based on a participatory analysis of the causes and effects of land degradation in northern Ghana. It primarily examines the underlying causes and effects of land degradation on farm households in a relatively highly populated area, and sheds light on the perception of land degradation by farm households as a production problem and their views concerning possible prevention and control measures for land degradation. The study revealed that the degradation of land and water resources in northern Ghana is well understood by farm households in the area. About 99 % of the households experience some form of land degradation viz. soil infertility, erosion or compaction; deforestation, overgrazing and weed infestation. Farm households clearly identified the human and natural causes of land degradation, and clearly linked the problem to increased demand for land. Suggested measures for combating the problem encompassed suitable soil and water conservation techniques as well conflict management procedures in land tenure arrangements and land use among households.

**Keywords:** Farm households, land degradation, Ghana, participatory analysis