



Tropentag, September 18-20, 2019, Kassel

“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Shocks and Coping Strategies of Forest-Dependent Households in Rural Kenya

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Abstract

Households in rural areas of developing countries such as Kenya are often depending on natural resources that supplement consumption and income-generating activities. Especially forests play an important role in the lives of local communities as they help to sustain their livelihoods. But this dependence on forests induces many challenges. Deforestation, forest degradation and the outcomes of climate change are serious threats to forest-dependent households. In the case of Kenya, approximately 5,000 ha of forest are depleted every year. This development puts pressure onto local households by increasing the exposure to shocks, leading to irreversible asset losses that cause households to fall into poverty. This study therefore aims to assess the occurrence of shocks among these local communities, the welfare impacts as well as the households' coping capacities. Therefore, a descriptive analysis of the occurrence of shocks will be provided. Furthermore, the study includes an impact model which will assess the impact of shocks on households' welfare by using Propensity Score Matching. And lastly, an adaptation model will be introduced to determine factors that influence the coping behaviour of rural households by using probit regressions. The analysis is based on cross-sectional data that was collected from 924 households in the region of Mt Elgon, Kenya, in November 2018. The survey addresses the effects of market-based incentives on forest conservation and development in rural areas of Kenya. Preliminary results suggest that almost every household had to face at least one shock during the last five years, the majority of them being agricultural. Especially droughts and floods but also large falls in sale prices for crops were most common. Furthermore, it could be seen that agricultural and social shocks were mainly counteracted with behaviour-based strategies while households who faced economic and health shocks often relied on asset-based strategies. But roughly 40 % of the shocks were not counteracted at all. This underlines the importance of further understanding of shocks and coping strategies. Until these risks are identified and eradicated, the vicious cycle of vulnerability will continue to diminish people's wellbeing.

Keywords: Coping strategies, forest-dependence, Kenya, shocks, vulnerability