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Exploring regenerative agriculture using photovoice: The case of the Mau Narok-Cherangany Complex in Kenya

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Abstract

Maize monocrop systems have led to land degradation, soil erosion, and loss of biodiversity in Kenya. A transition to agroecological farming and establishment of agroforestry and silvopastoral systems could increase tree cover and reduce farmers' exposure to climate change, while creating new livelihood opportunities and increasing rural prosperity.

Several studies have explored regenerative agriculture in Kenya, however, this research has not been farmer-led or participatory. This study responds to this research gap by adopting a farmer-led, participatory, visual research approach to exploring the future of regenerative agriculture in Kenya.

In this study, we used photovoice - a participatory, visual method - to explore farmers' adoption of regenerative agricultural practices in the Mau-Narok- Cherangany Complex. Farmers were purposefully selected based on their willingness to participate in the study; possession of a smart-phone with a camera; and a minimum of three years of farming experience. Farmers took photographs of the regenerative agricultural practices they had adopted in their farms and shared these photographs with the lead researcher via WhatsApp messenger. The photographs were printed and a discussion was held with farmers to further elaborate on and explore the stories they wanted to communicate with their images.

The photographs revealed that farmers had adopted a range of regenerative agricultural practices, from agroforestry involving the planting of coffee, bamboo, mango, avocado, and timber and medicinal trees in response to growing demand from the local and global markets for fruits and timber and non-timber products. The incorporation of trees into farming systems and a move away from maize grown as a monocrop created new economic livelihood opportunities for farm households, such as bee keeping, and generated wood for construction and fire wood. Farmers reported that the introduction of bamboo and terraces had resulted in the recovery of a local stream that had dried out; reduction of soil erosion and improvement of the riparian areas; and had increased insect and bird biodiversity by providing habitat.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of policymakers and practitioners supporting farmers in transitioning from monocrop system to more resilient perennial tree-crop-based, multi-species farming systems.

Keywords: Agroforestry, regenerative agriculture, silvopastoral, trees, visual research methods