

CAUSES/DRIVERS OF DEGRADATION OF LAND AND FORESTS DRY LANDS OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA.

There are many factors but the major ones are:

- * Poverty and food insecurity - food production and incomes of the people in the dry lands is low and in many places, conditions precipitated by low rainfall and concomitant productivity of the drylands. There is therefore, high dependence on natural resources (including forests and woodlands) for survival. Example include, charcoal extraction and forest grazing. The pressure on these resources is growing against a background of declining capacity of the resources to sustain them.
- * Inappropriate land use practices - with increasing populations and associated land shortages in the agriculturally more favourable highlands, there is considerable migration to the drylands and conversion of drylands into croplands, often rain-fed but irrigated in some cases. Design of most irrigation systems has also gone wrong. This conversion is probably the main cause of deforestation of dryland forests and degradation of ecosystems. The Ethiopian Rift valley dryland forest and ecosystems is one such system currently undergoing much destruction.
- * Poor market access - market for livestock (the main economic activity of people in the drylands) is poor particularly among the pastoral communities. In Kenya, for instance, the only 2 national abattoirs serving the drylands have been closed for many years. A consequence of this is overstocking (as an insurance against risks), a condition often leading to overgrazing deforestation and land degradation.
- * Declining rainfall - the average rainfall across the Sahel has, for instance diminished by 30% since the 70's. The causes of this are not known but global warming is a strong probability. This factor combined with high pressure due to grazing, wood extraction and cultivation makes regeneration of the ecosystem difficult. Water infiltration into eroded land is poor. Part of it runs off and part is evaporation. A consequence of this is drought and crop failure often leading to famine such as the chronic ones of Ethiopia.
- * Lack of individual and community ownership of natural resources - state ownership and management of forests is common all over sub Sahara Africa. Pre-independence state forest Codes are still in practice in many countries. Community participation in their management is limited. Land tenure is poor and individual ownership is often lacking. The Tragedy of the Commons is this common, a condition often leading to further degradation of resources. Conflicts over use of resources are also common and contribute to degradation of forest in all drylands. Other driving factors of land degradation includes: -
 - Inadequate investment in Research and Development of drylands natural resources
 - Poor information flow and networking between and among Research and Development institution in the drylands

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