

# **Trees, Agroforestry and Climate Change in Dryland Africa: Sociological Perspectives<sup>1</sup>**

## **Background**

Drylands, like other ecological environments in Africa are noted to be undergoing continuous and accelerated degradation. The degradation and ensuing desertification is generally associated with human activities augmented by harsh climatic conditions. In particular, the poor, especially in Drylands, are said to mine the environment despite knowing the detrimental consequences, not out of their choice, but the requirement to meet their practical needs (current consumption) without focussing on the future (strategic needs).

A number of sociological factors, which are inter-related, influence human activities in Drylands. These include human population numbers and structure, poverty and associated mitigation strategies aimed at sustaining livelihoods.

In the context of forestry, inhabitants of Drylands depend on forest and woodland resources for a host of products and services including wood for cooking, water for human and livestock, medicine, thatch- grass, crop and livestock production. Scarcity of these products and services have been associated with influx of human populations from areas of high agricultural potential areas, change in land use practices from extensive pastoralism to sedentary agriculture. The changes have been claimed to induce accelerated land degradation, conflict in the management of common-pool and open access resources like grazing land and water points; gender disparities in ownership, control and user-rights on critical factors of production like land. The livelihood base of inhabitants of Drylands have been claimed to worsen in terms of vulnerability, the scope and depth to poverty and constrained environmental resilience. A number of research issues emerge:

## **Demography**

1.1 What is the current trend in the demographic structure of Dryland populations and what are the implications of the trend for sustainable management of Dryland forests?

1.2 Indigenous populations have a belief that "trees attract rain". Is the claim that population increase leads to increased forest degradation valid?

## **2. Livelihoods and poverty**

2.1 What is the appropriate framework for livelihood analysis in the Drylands?

2.2 What are the appropriate sociological interventions for establishing sustainable livelihoods systems in Drylands through forestry ?

2.3 What has been the effect and impact of chronic, transient, and absolute poverty to degradation of Dryland forests and how can they be mitigated?

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2.4 What types of changes are apparent in gender dimensions of forest resources management in Drylands and what are the implications?