

Abstract

African wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems and as such play an important role in ameliorating the effects of global warming, biodiversity conservation as well as major source of natural resources which drives many rural economies. Yala swamp is a large fresh water wetland, a recognized biodiversity hotspot and support local livelihoods in the Lake Victoria basin in western Kenya. This study evaluated the socio - economic and environmental impacts of converting large parts of the swamp to farming to support perceived food security. Primary qualitative data was collected from semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews of randomly selected stakeholders. One hundred questionnaires were administered to the stakeholders who included men, women and youth. Secondary data was collected from published work, books, print and electronic media. The results indicate that although the conversion of the Yala swamp wetland is contributing in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), there exists a strong conflict with the local community. Overall the local community and the environment have been negatively impacted and there will be long term negative consequences regarding environmental degradation, food security and livelihood opportunities. This study recommends that the Kenya government should commission a new Environmental Impact Assessment and enact and implement a strong wetland policy. There is also need for awareness creation and sensitization to enhance participation of local communities in decision making. Other livelihood diversification programmes to reduce dependence on the wetland are also recommended.