

Abstract

The management of forest ecosystems globally is shifting from a top-down-approach, through centralised management by the state, to a more inclusive bottom-up approach involving community participation. Increasingly, there is a realisation that sustainable management of natural resources is dependent on the inclusion of local people or institutions through actions such as Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM). However, successful implementation of CBNRM depends on understanding the perception that local communities have of an ecosystem's resources. In this context, the present study examines the perceptions of local people on the status and threats facing the mangrove ecosystem of Mida Creek in Kenya. After consultation with these people, a closed ended questionnaire has been produced, investigating the perception of the local community on the degradation status of mangroves, as well as on the main threats affecting the mangroves. Furthermore, the study analysed the influence of the respondents' social characteristics on the choices they make about the degradation status and threats affecting the mangroves. Results show that 12% of the respondents consider the mangroves to be 'degraded' while 40% consider mangroves to be 'somewhat degraded'. The perceived drivers of mangrove degradation were human-induced activities such as firewood harvesting, pollution from plastics and faeces, pollution from oil spills, overharvesting for building materials and encroachment for settlements. Age, the size of the household and the location of the respondent were some of the variables that also affected the respondent's perceptions. Since problem identification is an important first step for tracing the causal chain behind resource degradation, the outcomes of this study are important for designing policies that could ameliorate problems. It also highlights the importance of involving the community in the initial stages of developing management policies, since they hold views that are necessary for policy change and improvement.