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INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITIES' AWARENESS ON CONSERVATION, RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF WETLANDS IN HASHENGE WATERSHED, ETHIOPIA

Yitbarek Gebremedhn

Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development
Tigray Regional State, Ethiopia
yitbarekgeb21@gmail.com

Supervisors

Sunna Áskelsdóttir
Soil Conservation Service of Iceland
sunna@land.is

Dr Thamar Melanie Heijstra

University of Iceland
thamar@hi.is

ABSTRACT

The study was carried out at Hashenge wetland in the administrative unit of Ofla district in the Southern zone of Tigray region, Northern Ethiopia. The study examines communities' awareness of wetland conditions, and the use and socio-economic benefits and challenges that the wetlands entail for the local communities. This study provides a better understanding of the local communities' level of awareness, socio-economic problems and the consequences that the watershed is facing. It also provides information to decision-makers, policymakers and scholars regarding long term goals for sustainable land use strategic planning for the wetlands and within the watershed, which could also be applied to other wetlands in Ethiopia. The study has been done using semi-structured interviews with 15 farmers and a focus group discussion with five development agents. Farmers said that the Hashenge wetlands provide numerous benefits to the farmers and local communities. They also realize, however, that the wetland is in danger and that the watershed is in severe degradation due to free grazing, farmland expansion, soil erosion, deforestation, and unsustainable use of the wetland area. The development agents and many farmers suggested that the government's role in the watershed is very weak. However, the local farmers have an awareness of the importance of conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of the wetland. The land-use system of the wetlands and the interest and knowledge of farmers regarding traditional farming have worsened the degradation of the wetlands. Besides, the major socio-economic problems influence negatively the livelihood and food insecurity problems of the farmers that in turn affects the wetlands.

Keywords: Hashenge wetlands, communities' awareness, free grazing, wetland degradation