

REVIEW OF THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS AND ITS IMPACT ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN TANZANIA

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Decentralization is commonly viewed as the transfer of legal and political authority from the central government and its agencies to the field organizations and institutions. This review analyzes the process, institutional and legal framework within which the environmental and natural resources management operates in Tanzania. It specifically focuses on the decentralization within central and local governments' role in environmental management.

Lawyers' environmental action team. The Lawyers' Environmental Action Team is the first public interest environmental law organization in Tanzania. It was established in 1994 and formally registered in 1995 under the Societies Ordinance. Its mission is to ensure sound natural resource management and environmental protection in Tanzania. It is also involved in issues related to the establishment of an enabling policy environment for civil society, including civil liberties and human rights.

Background to the Environmental Problems Facing in Tanzania. Tanzania covers an area of 945,000km² and is one of Africa's most ecologically rich countries. The diverse climatic and physical conditions range from arid, semi-arid, and mountainous areas of afro-alpine vegetation, woodland and dry land savannah. About 40% of Tanzania is covered by forests and woodlands, which host various types of ecosystems. Tanzania's eastern coastline extends about 240km north to south along the Indian Ocean. Additionally, there are several lakes, rivers and swamps, which contain diverse types of aquatic life. The major environmental problems are; 1) loss of wildlife habitats and biodiversity; 2) deforestation; 3) land degradation; 4) deterioration of aquatic systems; 5) lack of accessible, good quality water; and 6) environmental pollution.

Land Degradation. Human impacts on deforestation; soil erosion, overgrazing, and degradation of water resources and loss of biodiversity have all resulted into land degradation. Poor agricultural practices such as shifting cultivation, lack of crop rotation practices, lack of agricultural technology and land husbandry techniques exacerbate the problem.

Pollution Management and Urbanization. Pollution is a major problem in urban areas of Tanzania. Improper treatment and disposal of solid and liquid wastes are the major contributors to urban area pollution. The combined results of these problems are that both air and water have been contaminated with pollutants, which are detrimental to human health.

Agricultural and Range Land Resources Management. Agriculture and rangeland resources are the backbone of Tanzania's economy. It is estimated that about 55% of the land could be used for agriculture and over 51% for pastoral lands. However, only about six percent of the agricultural land is cultivated with the practice of shifting cultivation which causes deforestation and land degradation on the pastoral land.

Management of Forest Resources. Forest resources provide both direct products and by-products. The forest reserves are also linked with agriculture, beekeeping, energy, water uses and biodiversity. The mismanagement of fuel resources significantly contributes to deforestation and environmental degradation.

Management of Wildlife Resources. Tanzania is one of the few countries with vast number of wildlife resources. Tanzania's "protected areas" cover about 25% of the total land. The protected land is comprised of national parks, game reserves, game controlled areas and the Ngoro Ngoro Conservation Area. Unfortunately, communities living around these protected areas, live in uncertain conditions visited by persistent attacks by the wild animals and destruction of their crops.

Management of Mineral Resources. The Tanzanian economy depends upon mineral resources for a major source of its revenues. However, mineral exploitation is often done without regard to environmental and social impacts. Thus the Mining Act of 1998 addressed this problem and required mining companies to conduct environmental impact assessments. Mining activities are major cause of environmental degradation by deforestation, destruction of habitat, loss of biodiversity and general damage to the land.

Local Government Reforms and Environmental Management. Besides the public sector and local government reforms stressing the need to decentralize, several other macro-policy documents published in recent years have also reiterated this new thinking in government. Several government policies published between 1995 and 1998 and the amendments made on the Local Government Acts have emphasized the need for local communities to participate in the environmental management.

To attain sustainable development, Tanzania needs to balance its accelerated economic growth with efficient management of the environment, coupled with sustainable use of natural resources.

National Forestry Policy. National Forestry Policy (NFP) seek to achieve its policy goal of "enhancing the contribution of the forest sector to the sustainable development of Tanzania and the conservation and management of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

National Environmental Policy: The National Environment Policy (NEP) recognises the indispensable role of local governments in achieving its policy objectives. Local governments construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, and establish local environmental policies and regulations.

National Land Policy: The main objective of the NLP is to promote and ensure wise use of land, guide allocations, prevent degradation and resolve conflicts. On the issues related to environmental management, this policy is one of the major guiding principles to local authorities, which are in dire need of decision making mandates on land use and resources. The NLP tries to protect the environment and natural resources

