

Population and the environment: Linking community reproductive health to Kakamega forest conservation in Western Kenya

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Abstract

The rapid decline of the world's forests is one of the major environmental challenges of the century. Some of the underlying or indirect causes of forest decline include people, poverty, plunder and policy.¹ Although the role of population has remained controversial, recent World Bank studies have demonstrated strong inter-linkages between rapid population growth, low farm productivity and deforestation throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Kakamega Forest in Kenya has an area that is only ten percent of its original size. Without intervention, the forest is threatened with destruction within an estimated 20 years, leading to desertification and elimination of water sources and source of livelihood. The Western region, where Kakamega is located, maintains the highest population growth rates in the country. The Kakamega community has among the lowest health indicators in the country, with maternal and infant mortality, STI and HIV rates at three times the national average.

This presentation shares results of intervention strategies applied in 250 villages in collaboration with the community:

Management of high population growth through a family planning program
Conservation education
Promotion of alternative forest derived fuel wood and fodder. Introduction and promotion of income generating activities
Forest resource management.

Community health workers increased distribution of family planning by 60%. 50% of the communities adopted new fuel-conserving stoves that eliminate the need to cut excessive amounts of wood, and they planted fast growing trees as a way to begin reversing deforestation. Villages initiated income-generating projects that do not adversely impact the forest.

Learning Objectives:

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Participants will be able to

- Identify strategies to increase family planning services in settings with limited infrastructure
- Identify conservation techniques that can be applied with limited resources to combat deforestation
- Articulate strategies for sustainability of integrated population programs in forest communities