

Abstract

Forest degradation and depletion are globally recognised challenges, though their drivers are highly context-specific. Natural forests are vital for maintaining ecological stability, yet they face increasing pressure from expanding human activities. Therefore, this study investigates the dynamics of forest management in the Livingstone Ranges, Southern Highlands of Tanzania. Data were collected from 144 households using a mixed-methods approach that combined household surveys with in-depth interviews to generate both qualitative and quantitative insights. Findings reveal that the main driver of forest degradation is the conversion of forestland into cropland, a process intensified by limited arable land and inadequate access to subsidised fertilisers. High urban demand for timber has also encouraged the planting of invasive tree species near natural forests, threatening native ecosystems. The market-driven activities, compounded by land shortages and limited access to inorganic fertilizers, have prompted communities to convert forests into cropland. To address the challenges facing natural forests, the study recommends establishing a comprehensive land-use plan, promoting sustainable farming practices, and improving access to agricultural inputs for rural communities.