

ABSTRACT

Political Ecology analyses the manifestations of power in human-environment relations, particularly the motivations and consequences of different actors vying for the control of environmental resources. This study examined the influence of local political, economic and social factors on the ongoing degradation in Awoja Watershed in Eastern Uganda. Specifically, the study characterized: recent trends in land use changes in the watershed and examined the influence of local political interests, emerging economic interests and socio cultural factors on the management of resource access in Awoja. The study was conducted in Soroti, Katakwi and Amuria districts among households that are affected by the frequent floods, draughts and the governance efforts to demarcate and conserve the environment in this area. Quantitative data were analysed using remote sensing and Stata software (version 13.1). The study employed a factor analysis and Logit model as analytical tools to determine the correlation and the influence of political, economic and social factors to watershed management. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Altogether 226 respondents from 3 districts most affected by draughts and floods in the watershed participated in the study. From the Remote Sensing, the analysis of land use characteristics showed trends of increasing degradation evidenced by dynamic changes in land use/cover types from the period 1986 to 2016. There was an increase in built areas from 0.21% between 1986-1996; to 3.28 between 2006 and 2016 and a notable decrease in forest cover from 107.48 Km² in 1,986 to 6.94 Km² by 2016. The results also show a dramatic increase in small scale farming area from 629.44 Km² to 2,376.64 Km² from 1986-2016 while the area of wetland reduced from 2,810.47 Km² to 1,355 Km² over the same period. From the correlation results, the findings show a significant relationship between the political process factors and management of the watershed ($r = 0.483$ $P < 0.001$). The results however indicated a negative relationship between climate change and watershed management ($r = -0.098$, $P > 0.05$) depicting the constraints posed by climate change to effective resource management. The relationship between climate change factor and political interests was positive and significant ($r = 0.377$, $P < 0.001$). On the influence of political factor variables on watershed management, the findings from the logistical regression show evidence of compromise, inaction and limited compliance to rules and regulations. Dissatisfaction with regulations had an increasing influence on watershed management by up to 90.8% (OR=1.908, $P < 0.05$). Compromises and renegotiation of rules by Disaster Management Committees (DRMCs) had significant increasing influence on watershed management by 3 fold (OR=3.436537, $P < 0.05$). Similarly, increasing economic interests and commoditization of watershed resources as well as changes in household needs had significant influence on watershed management while the influence of social issues factors particularly social cohesion and conflicts in the use of the watershed had a decreasing influence on watershed management. The findings suggest that local compromises and the resistance to state control were evident among many actors and watershed communities. This had reduced the efficacy of local resource protection institutions and catalyzed activities that led to land degradation in Awoja. The sustainable management of the watershed is possible if the functionality of local institutions is improved, political interests delinked, rules and regulations are adequately implemented and the roles of social institutions are reviewed.