

ABSTRACT

Agriculture remains the most vital sector in the economy of Kenya as it contributes the most to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country as well as a very important source of livelihoods to many citizens. Land is a key factor in agricultural production and thus majority of the rural households, especially in sub-Saharan Africa depend on land-related activities for their livelihoods in terms of food and employment. However, in recent past, the contribution of agricultural sector to the GDP of Kenya has been declining over the years. Rural population are facing increased levels of poverty and inability to get sustainable livelihoods in terms of income and food. This adversely affects smallholder farmers especially in densely populated areas where there is high pressure on land and uncontrolled land uses. This study sought to determine the household land size change in the study area, established the existing household land uses and respective financial returns and food sufficiency in the study area, examined the household livelihood diversification strategies and respective financial returns in the study area and proposed land use planning interventions that can ensure sustainable rural livelihoods in Kirangi Sub-location. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Number of households made a sample frame. Stratified random sampling was employed to select households from strata drawn from each village. Strata comprised of male-headed, female-headed and child-headed households. Key informants were selected using purposive sampling. Participants of focused group discussion were selected using stratified random sampling. Strata were made up of male, female and youth. The total number of households interviewed in Kirangi Sub-location was 91. Data analysis was done using SPSS software and descriptive methods. Data presentation was through charts, tables, cross tabulation and narratives. Research findings revealed that land size has reduced tremendously from 14 acres that the parents of the respondents owned to 3.2 acres that the households currently own, with a majority of the households having 2.7 acres. Hypothesis test indicate that the change in land size is highly significant with a $t=7.80$, $P=0.000$ which is less than 0.001. However, 2 acres was found to be the minimum land size for tea farming that is sufficient to meet livelihood needs at optimal production level in the area. The study concluded that households in the area undertake varied land uses. Tea which was found to be the leading land use had a mean land size of 1.67 acres. Other cash crops apart from tea recorded a mean land size of 0.55 acres. Food crops and dairy farming had a mean of 0.3 acres. Further, the study reached a conclusion that households engage in income diversification strategies, both farming and off-farm. However, it was found out that off-farm diversification brings more income to households than on-farm diversification. Mean annual household income is 28,168 and 142,444 for on-farm and off-farm diversification respectively. The study thus proposes the following land use planning strategies; setting up of minimum land size to curb land subdivision, government to create enabling environment in ASASL lands so as to divert population from arable lands, Public education and sensitization on the need for land consolidation and youth empowering through job creation, creation of enabling environment for self-employment and provision of subsidies and incentives to start and run businesses. This will reduce dependency on land as the only source of livelihood. Therefore, for further research, the study recommended that a more in-depth research should be conducted to determine sustainable ways to stop land subdivision. A study focusing on preferred human settlements for rural households was also recommended to save on space to solve the issue of scattered homesteads that occupy substantial amount of land.