

Systematic review of drivers of riverbank cultivation, human livelihoods and conservation in Southern Africa

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Abstract

Riverbank cultivation is an activity that has existed for decades in developing countries. Despite the threats it poses to riverine ecosystems against associated human livelihood benefits, the effectiveness of conservation strategies has been put to the test in different countries. Therefore, a continual understanding of the spatial and temporal dynamics of the nexus between drivers of streambank cultivation and human livelihood is key to formulating conservation strategies that promote sustainable development. The study's main objective was to investigate the link between the drivers of riverbank cultivation, sustainable livelihoods and conservation strategies through a systematic review of literature for southern Africa, using a pre-determined criterion from 2010 to 2020. A total of 43 scientific publications were analyzed. The study used the theory of change, which is informed by the Environmental Kutznet Curve (EKC) Theory of environmental degradation, to analyse the nexus between the three variables. Direct drivers include; access to land use, environmental degradation, decline related to climate change/frequent drought, and unmatched demand for arable land. The indirect drivers include; unsustainable livelihoods, population pressures and lack of knowledge all work together to influence riverbank cultivation. The study concludes that protection of riverbanks can be achieved by implementing sustainable natural resource management, by strengthening existing policies.

Keywords Access to land, environmental degradation, population pressures, southern Africa, sustainable livelihoods