



Kenya: A Natural Outlook: Chapter 12. Vegetation (Developments in Earth Surface Processes)

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Monitoring vegetation dynamics and land cover change in Kenya are essential for the sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity conservation. However, accurate status of seasonal variation in vegetation and long-term land cover change data valid at the regional and country level generally do not exist or are hard to obtain. Here, we describe the various ecological regions of Kenya and the associated rainfall and land cover patterns of each ecological zone. This includes the use of low-resolution satellite data time series to characterise for each ecoregion and land cover type the interannual variability of the vegetation cycle, including the start-, mid- and end of the growing season. Seasonal variation in vegetation phenology is mapped to highlight the areas of greatest interannual variation and compared to rainfall patterns over the focal study period. Statistical estimates of land cover change are produced for six broad classes for the years 1990, 2000 and 2010, based on detailed land cover change assessed by a systematic sampling of high-resolution satellite imagery. Rates of change for Kenya are presented and discussed in light of the low-resolution time series analysis. Results highlight information on land cover change processes such as vegetation dynamics and deforestation. These are discussed within the context of the drivers of changes to the natural ecosystem—their potential impact on land availability for human activities such as agriculture and logging for timber and fire wood production on the one side and habitat and biodiversity conservation on the other side. Finally, biodiversity and habitat value, ecosystems and threats are analysed for Kenya's conservation and protected areas so as to identify the status of and pressures on the country's protected areas. Six indicators of species irreplaceability, habitat irreplaceability and the level of perceived threat to a protected area's habitat and species from agriculture and human population are analysed. In addition, high-resolution satellite images taken over conservation areas are used for assessing land cover changes inside protected areas and in the surrounding 20km buffer zone. The results show the importance and effectiveness of protected areas in reducing the loss of natural vegetation and hence protecting the habitats and biodiversity.

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