ABSTRACT

Climate change has become a key development challenge, and its effects are more felt in pastoral systems, as a major land use and source of livelihood for many communities in Kenya. The rising vulnerability of pastoral systems in the country is driven by extreme weather events such as rising temperatures, droughts, floods and changing rainfall patterns. Projections indicate that such extreme weather events will increase in future, exacerbating land degradation and loss of biodiversity. This will lead to less tenable and more vulnerable pastoral systems. Despite the challenges, livestock production, including pastoral systems, has been widely mapped by global, regional and national policies and development plans to be important in building resilient food systems and supporting economic development. For instance, one of the objectives of the National Livestock Policy is to improve management of livestock, feed and rangeland resources while promoting environmental resilience. Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture Strategy also, identifies need to enhance conservation and propagation of germplasm of species that are adaptive and tolerant to adverse weather conditions as a priority action. Effective implementation of such actions need to be based on scientific evidence. The World Bank has, however, indicated that lack of evidence has remained a major limiting factor in the adoption and implementation of climate smart practices in Kenya, leading to miss or under-informed actions. Weak understanding of community perceptions and drivers to pasture production and conservation and how their indigenous knowledge can be used to complement scientific evidence to out-scale adoption of climate smart practices is a key barrier to enhancing management and conservation grazing resources. Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC showed the importance of using diverse forms of knowledge, including indigenous knowledge to increase adoption, effectiveness and sustainability of climate actions. This study aims to assess the socio-cultural and economic value of indigenous grass ecotypes in order to inform their sustainable use and conservation actions among pastoral communities in northern Kenya. The study will be conducted in Isiolo and Samburu Counties; which are among ASAL counties, characterized by rangeland degradation and loss of indigenous grass ecotypes. A mix of methods will be used for data collection and analysis. This study will create evidence on knowledge, benefits and investment needs for conserving indigenous grasses as perceived by pastoral communities. This will provide complementary insights for more effective climate actions for reducing degradation of indigenous grasses, enhancing their conservation and productivity for strengthened livestock systems in the ASALs of Kenya.