

Assessment of The Effects of Land Degradation on Rural Livelihood in Selected Communities of Kachia Local Government Area, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Land degradation poses a serious threat to rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in communities dependent on agriculture and natural resources. This study investigates the spatial extent, drivers, and livelihood impacts of land degradation in Kwaturu, Kurmin Musa, and Sabon Sarki communities of Kachia Local Government Area, Kaduna State, Nigeria. A mixed-method approach combining multi-temporal satellite imagery (2005, 2015, 2025), structured household questionnaires, and key informant interviews was employed. Remote sensing analysis determined the extent of vegetation loss, farmland expansion, and bare land increase, while socio-economic data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Multiple regression, logistic regression, and ANOVA assessed the relationship between land degradation indicators and rural livelihoods. Results show vegetation cover declined from 45% in 2005 to 25% in 2025, while farmland increased from 35% to 55%, confirming ongoing degradation. Interviews revealed that agricultural expansion, overgrazing, and fuelwood collection are the primary drivers. Regression results indicate deforestation and overgrazing significantly reduce livelihood outcomes, while soil fertility positively influences household welfare. Logistic regression demonstrates that households in degraded areas are more likely to experience poverty. ANOVA confirmed the significance of land use changes over time ($p < 0.05$). Qualitative data corroborate quantitative findings, showing reduced crop yield, declining income, and heightened food insecurity as major livelihood impacts. The study recommends afforestation, soil conservation, controlled grazing, and community-based land management strategies to mitigate negative impacts.

Keywords: Land degradation, rural livelihoods, GIS, remote sensing, deforestation & poverty

Introduction

Land is a vital resource underpinning rural livelihood, particularly in agrarian economies where it supports crop production, livestock rearing, and income generation (Ellis, 2000). Across sub-Saharan Africa, increasing population pressure and unsustainable land-use practices such as deforestation, overgrazing, and continuous cultivation have accelerated land degradation, leading to declining soil fertility, vegetation loss, and reduced agricultural productivity (Akinbode, 2002; Adu, 2013; UNCCD, 2017). These changes pose serious threats to food security and the socio-economic stability of rural households.

In northern Nigeria, including Kaduna State, the problem is intensified by reliance on subsistence agriculture, widespread fuelwood extraction, and extensive grazing systems (Geist & Lambin, 2004). The resulting environmental degradation has direct implications for livelihoods, including reduced crop yields, declining household income, and increased vulnerability to poverty (Barbier, 1997; Ellis, 2000). Despite growing attention to these challenges, many studies have examined land degradation and rural livelihoods separately, with limited integration of spatial analysis and household-level evidence at the local scale.

Against this backdrop, this study is designed to achieve four key objectives. The first objective is to assess the spatial extent and temporal dynamics of land degradation in Kwaturu, Kurmin Musa, and Sabon Sarki using GIS and multi-temporal satellite imagery spanning 2005 to 2025. The second objective is to examine the socio-economic characteristics of households in the study area in order to understand the human context within which land degradation occurs. The third objective is to identify the key human and environmental drivers of land degradation, including activities such as fuelwood extraction, agricultural expansion, population pressure, soil infertility, and climate variability. The fourth objective is to evaluate the effects of land degradation on rural livelihoods, particularly with respect to crop production, livestock performance, income levels, and overall household welfare.

By integrating geospatial techniques with socio-economic and qualitative data, this study provides a comprehensive and empirically grounded understanding of land degradation processes and their implications. The findings are expected to contribute to evidence-based strategies for sustainable land management and rural development in semi-arid regions of Nigeria.

Literature Review

Concept and Dimensions of Land Degradation

Land degradation refers to the decline in the productive capacity of land due to both natural processes and human activities, resulting in reduced soil fertility, loss of vegetation cover, and diminished ecosystem services (Lal, 2001; UNCCD, 2017). It is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing physical, chemical, and biological deterioration of land resources. Physical degradation includes soil erosion and compaction, chemical degradation involves nutrient depletion and salinization, while biological degradation relates to loss of soil organic matter and biodiversity.

In semi-arid regions such as northern Nigeria, land degradation is particularly severe due to fragile ecosystems and climatic variability. The cumulative effect of these processes reduces agricultural productivity and limits the resilience of rural livelihoods, making it a critical environmental and socio-economic concern.

Drivers of Land Degradation

Land degradation is driven by a complex interaction of human and environmental factors. Human-induced drivers include deforestation, agricultural expansion, overgrazing, and fuelwood extraction, all of which contribute to vegetation loss and soil exhaustion (Geist & Lambin, 2004; FAO, 2015). Rapid population growth further intensifies pressure on land resources, leading to the cultivation of marginal lands and unsustainable land-use practices.

Environmental factors such as climate variability, prolonged drought, and erratic rainfall patterns also play a significant role in accelerating degradation processes. These factors reduce soil moisture, hinder vegetation regeneration, and increase susceptibility to erosion (Lal, 2001). In many rural settings, the interaction between human activities and environmental stressors creates a reinforcing cycle of degradation, where declining land productivity compels further exploitation of already degraded land.

Land Degradation and Rural Livelihoods

The relationship between land degradation and rural livelihoods is deeply interconnected. Rural households depend heavily on land for food production, income generation, and overall well-being (Ellis, 2000). As land quality declines, agricultural productivity decreases, leading to reduced household income and increased vulnerability to food insecurity.

The sustainable livelihoods framework emphasizes that environmental resources are central to livelihood security, and any degradation of these resources directly affects the ability of households to cope with economic shocks (Chambers & Conway, 1992). In northern Nigeria, studies have shown that land degradation contributes to declining crop yields, poor pasture conditions, and increased incidence of livestock diseases, thereby undermining both crop and livestock production systems (Adu, 2013; Akinbode, 2002).

Furthermore, land degradation often exacerbates poverty by limiting livelihood diversification opportunities. Households become trapped in a cycle where reduced productivity forces them to intensify land use, which in turn accelerates further degradation.

Application of GIS and Remote Sensing in Land Degradation Studies

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing techniques have become essential tools for assessing land degradation and monitoring land use/land cover changes over time. These technologies enable the analysis of spatial and temporal patterns of environmental change, providing objective and reliable data for decision-making (Jensen, 2007; Lillesand et al., 2015).

Multi-temporal satellite imagery allows researchers to detect changes in vegetation cover, expansion of agricultural land, and increase in bare surfaces, which are key indicators of land degradation. The integration of GIS with socio-economic data further enhances understanding by linking spatial patterns of degradation with human activities and livelihood outcomes.

Recent studies emphasize that combining remote sensing with field-based data improves the accuracy and relevance of environmental assessments, making it a valuable approach for sustainable land management planning (FAO, 2015).

Empirical Review and Research Gap

Empirical studies on land degradation have largely focused on either biophysical assessments or socio-economic impacts in isolation. While remote sensing studies have successfully quantified land use changes, they often lack detailed insights into how these changes affect rural livelihoods at the household level. Conversely, socio-economic studies provide valuable information on livelihood dynamics but frequently lack spatial evidence of environmental change.

This gap is particularly evident in Kachia Local Government Area, where limited studies have integrated geospatial analysis with household-level data. By combining GIS-based assessment of land degradation with socio-economic and qualitative data, this study bridges this gap and provides a more holistic understanding of the interactions between environmental change and rural livelihoods.

Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted in Kwaturu, Kurmin Musa, and Sabon Sarki communities in Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. The area lies approximately between latitudes 9°30'N and 10°15'N and longitudes 7°45'E and 8°30'E, and is predominantly rural with dispersed settlements and strong dependence on land-based resources.

The relief consists of gently undulating plains with occasional low hills typical of the Northern Guinea Savannah. Elevation ranges between 600 and 800 meters above sea level. Drainage is dominated by seasonal streams that flow during the rainy season and largely dry up in the dry season.

Soils in the area are mainly ferruginous tropical soils, which are moderately fertile but prone to nutrient depletion and erosion under continuous cultivation and poor land management practices.

The area experiences a tropical wet-and-dry (Aw) climate with rainfall occurring between April and October and a dry season from November to March. Annual rainfall ranges from 1,000 mm to 1,300 mm, while temperatures generally range between 25°C and 32°C.

Vegetation is predominantly Guinea Savannah, characterized by scattered trees, shrubs, and grasses. However, human activities such as farming, fuelwood collection, and deforestation have significantly altered the natural vegetation cover.

Kachia Local Government Area has an estimated population of 252,568 people (National Population Commission, 2006), with ongoing growth driven by rural settlement expansion and natural increase. The population is largely agrarian and exerts increasing pressure on land resources.

Settlements in the study area are rural and dispersed, with communities organized in village clusters. The dominant economic activity is agriculture, with residents engaged in the cultivation of crops such as maize, millet, sorghum, and cassava, as well as livestock rearing. Other activities include fuelwood collection and petty trading, with livelihoods closely tied to land resources.

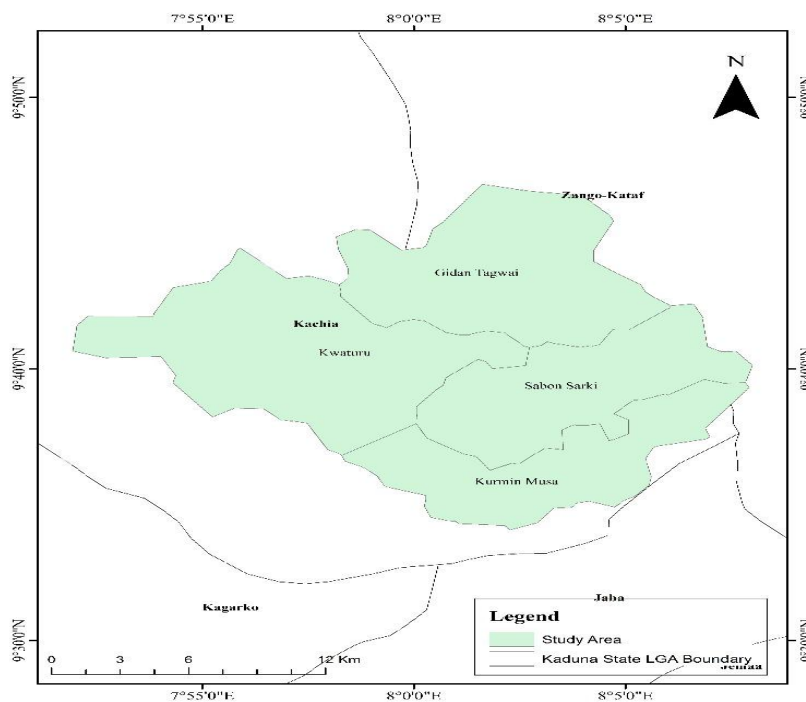


Figure 1: Map of Kachia Local Government Area showing Kwaturu, Kurmin Musa, and Sabon Sarki communities.

Materials and Methods

The study adopted a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component involved the analysis of spatial data derived from satellite imagery and statistical evaluation of household survey data, while the qualitative component involved key informant interviews to provide contextual insights into land degradation processes and livelihood conditions. The integration of these approaches allowed for a comprehensive assessment of both the biophysical extent of land degradation and its socio-economic implications.

Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to households and key informant interviews conducted with community leaders, farmers, and local authorities.

Secondary data included satellite imagery for land use/land cover analysis, published literature, government reports, and demographic data from the National Population Commission (NPC).

The study population comprised households in Kwaturu, Kurmin Musa, and Sabon Sarki communities within Kachia Local Government Area. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, the three communities were purposively selected due to their prominence in agricultural activities and observable land degradation.

Secondly, households within each community were selected using simple random sampling to ensure equal representation. A total of 300 households were sampled for questionnaire administration. This sample size was considered adequate to capture variability in socio-economic characteristics and livelihood patterns. Data collection was carried out using the following instruments and equipment:

Structured questionnaires for household surveys

Interview guides for key informant interviews

Global Positioning System (GPS) device for ground truthing

Computer systems equipped with GIS software

The study utilized multi-temporal satellite imagery from the Landsat series obtained from the United States Geological Survey (USGS). Specifically: Landsat imagery for the years 2005, 2015, and 2025, spatial resolution of 30 meters. These images were selected to capture long-term land use/land cover changes and assess the extent of land degradation over time.

The satellite images were processed using Geographic Information System (GIS) and remote sensing techniques. The steps involved include: Image Pre-processing: This involved radiometric and geometric correction to improve image quality and alignment.

Image Classification: Supervised classification was performed using training samples to categorize land use/land cover into classes such as forest, shrubland, agricultural land, and built-up areas.

Change Detection Analysis: Post-classification comparison was used to identify changes in land cover between 2005, 2015, and 2025. Spatial Analysis: GIS software was used to calculate area coverage for each land use class and to map the spatial distribution of land degradation.

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to analyze socio-economic data from questionnaires. Inferential statistics including multiple regression analysis, logistic regression, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to examine relationships between land degradation variables and livelihood outcomes. Regression analysis was used to determine the effect of land degradation variables on rural livelihoods. Logistic regression assessed the likelihood of households experiencing poverty in degraded areas. ANOVA was used to test the statistical significance of differences in land use/land cover changes over time.

To ensure validity, the research instruments were reviewed by experts in environmental management. Reliability was enhanced through pre-testing of questionnaires in a similar community before full deployment.

Result of the Findings

Table 1: Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 300)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	186	62.0
Female	114	38.0
Age Group (years)		
<25	42	14.0
25–34	78	26.0
35–44	96	32.0
45–54	54	18.0
55+	30	10.0
Marital Status		
Single	48	16.0
Married	216	72.0
Widowed	36	12.0
Education		
No formal education	132	44.0
Primary	78	26.0
Secondary	66	22.0
Tertiary	24	8.0
Occupation		
Farming	186	62.0
Livestock rearing	48	16.0
Trading	36	12.0
Civil service	18	6.0
Others	12	4.0
Household Size		
1–4	48	16.0
5–8	156	52.0

Respondents are largely male and economically active (62%), reflecting labor-intensive agricultural activities (Ellis, 2000). Farming predominates (62%), indicating pressure on land resources. Large household sizes (52%) and low formal education (44%) may limit adoption of sustainable practices (Chambers & Conway, 1992). These socio-economic patterns explain high land use intensity and vulnerability to degradation. The socio-economic characteristics indicate that the majority of respondents are in the economically active age group, with a strong reliance on land-based livelihoods. Farming is the dominant occupation, implying high pressure on land resources. Large household sizes combined with low levels of formal education may hinder adoption of sustainable land management practices (Ellis, 2000; Chambers & Conway, 1992). Gender distribution shows a male majority, which is typical for agricultural work in rural northern Nigeria. These socio-economic patterns help explain the observed land use intensity and vulnerability to degradation.

Assessment of the Extent and Spatial Distribution of Land Degradation Satellite Imageries of the Study Area

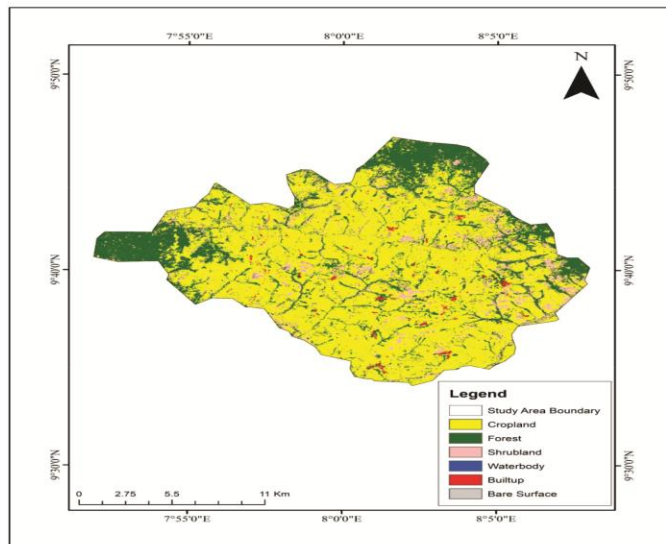


Figure 4.1: Land Use/Land Cover Maps of the Study Area for 2005

Source: Author's compilation from Landsat imagery (2005-2025) processed in ArcGIS

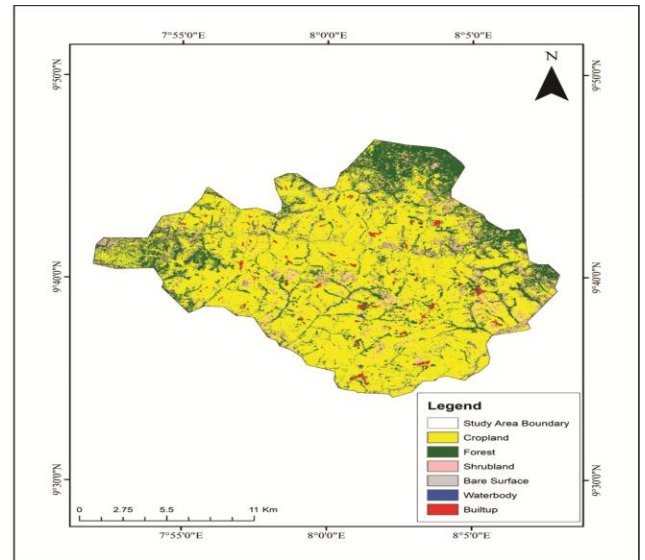


Figure 4.3: Land Use/Land Cover Maps of the Study Area for 2025

Source: Author's compilation from Landsat imagery (2005-2025) processed in ArcGIS

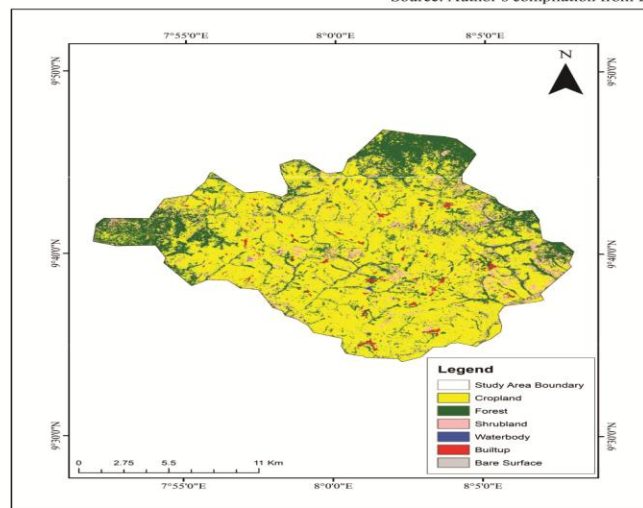


Figure 4.2: Land Use/Land Cover Maps of the Study Area for 2015

Source: Author's compilation from Landsat imagery (2005-2025) processed in ArcGIS

Table 2: Land Use/Land Cover Change Statistics (2005-2025)

Land Cover Class	Area 2005 (km ²)	Area 2015 (km ²)	Area 2025 (km ²)	Net Change (2005-2025)
Agricultural Land	233.58	228.32	227.18	-6.40
Bare Surface	0.02	0.00	0.00	-0.02
Built-up	2.83	3.90	4.22	+1.40
Forest	87.02	88.18	82.59	-4.43
Shrubland	46.00	49.06	55.38	+9.38
Waterbody	0.07	0.05	0.14	+0.07

Source: Author's compilation from Landsat imagery (2005-2025) processed in ArcGIS

ANOVA: $F(5, 12)=15.73$, $p<0.01$

Forest cover declined (-4.43 km²), while shrubland increased (+9.38 km²), confirming degradation. Built-up areas grew (+1.40 km²), reflecting population pressure. ANOVA indicates these changes are significant. Findings align with Geist & Lambin (2004), who report that deforestation and secondary vegetation expansion are primary indicators of degradation.

The most notable changes were the persistent expansion of Shrubland, which increased by 9.38 km², and the net decline of Forest cover, which decreased by 4.43 km². Built-up areas also showed consistent growth, expanding by 1.40 km². The spatio-temporal distribution of these changes is visualized in the LULC maps for 2005, 2015, and 2025. Satellite imagery shows a significant decrease in forested areas and an increase in cultivated land over the study period. This spatial evidence corroborates respondents' perceptions of degradation and highlights areas most affected. The integration of remote sensing confirms both the extent and spatial distribution of land degradation, which is critical for planning sustainable interventions (Jensen, 2007; FAO, 2015).

Human Factors Contributing to Deforestation and Overgrazing

Table 3: Human Drivers (n = 300)

Factor	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Fuelwood/ Charcoal use	144 (48.0%)	90 (30.0%)	36 (12.0%)	30 (10.0%)
Timber harvesting	120 (40.0%)	90 (30.0%)	54 (18.0%)	36 (12.0%)
Population Pressure	114 (38.0%)	78 (26.0%)	60 (20.0%)	48 (16.0%)

From the table, fuelwood/charcoal records the highest value (48%), followed by timber harvesting (40%), while population pressure has the lowest (38%). This indicates that fuelwood/charcoal extraction is the dominant driver of land degradation in the study area. The pattern aligns with FAO (2015) and Geist and Lambin (2004), which identify fuelwood use and timber extraction as key contributors to deforestation, while population pressure plays a less direct but contributing role.

Environmental Factors Influencing Land Degradation**Table 4 Environmental Drivers (n = 300)**

Factor	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Prolonged drought	108 (36.0%)	78 (26.0%)	2 (24.0%)	42 (14.0%)
Soil infertility	132 (44.0%)	90 (30.0%)	48 (16.0%)	30 (10.0%)
Climate variability	102 (34.0%)	96 (32.0%)	54 (18.0%)	48 (16.0%)

ANOVA: $F(2,12)=11.45$, $p<0.01$

Table 4 indicates that environmental stressors, particularly drought (36% agreement), soil infertility (44%), and climate variability (34%), play an important role in intensifying land degradation. Prolonged drought limits soil moisture and hampers vegetation regrowth, while infertile soils reduce crop yields, compelling farmers to cultivate marginal lands. Climate variability disrupts cropping calendars and increases the likelihood of overexploitation of land.

Effects of Land Degradation on Rural Livelihoods**Table 5 Livelihood Impacts (n = 300)**

Effect	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reduced crop Yield	174 (58.0%)	108 (36.0%)	12 (4.0%)	6 (2.0%)
Poor pasture Quality	150 (50.0%)	114 (38.0%)	18 (6.0%)	18 (6.0%)
Livestock Diseases	132 (44.0%)	120 (40.0%)	24 (8.0%)	24 (8.0%)

The table above indicates that land degradation adversely affects both crop and livestock production. A combined 94% of respondents agreed that crop yields have declined, directly threatening household food security. Poor pasture quality (88% agreement) reduces livestock productivity, while increased livestock diseases (84% agreement) further diminish marketable livestock outputs.

The data confirm the third research objective, illustrating the link between land degradation and rural poverty. Households experience reduced income, food insecurity, and heightened vulnerability, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions.

Existing Land Management Strategies**Table 6 Awareness and Effectiveness of Strategies (n = 300)**

Strategy	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)	Not Effective (%)
Agroforestry	32.0	68.0	80.0
Controlled grazing	30.0	70.0	84.0
Afforestation	28.0	72.0	86.0

Table indicates that awareness and effectiveness of land management strategies are low. Only 32% of respondents are aware of agroforestry, while the majority report strategies as ineffective (80–86%). Limited technical support, resources, and community coordination reduce adoption rates.

The findings highlight gaps in implementing sustainable land management interventions. Enhancing awareness, technical capacity, and community engagement is essential for reducing land degradation and improving livelihoods, fulfilling the fourth research objective.

Econometric Model Specification

The study employs multiple regression, logistic regression, and instrumental variable techniques to address potential endogeneity.

Table 7 Multiple and Logic Regression Results

Multiple Regression

Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-value
Deforestation	-0.45	-3.21	0.002*
Overgrazing	-0.52	-4.10	0.000*
Soil Fertility	0.38	2.85	0.005*
Constant	2.10	5.12	0.000*

* denotes variable significance at 0.05 level of significance

Logistic Regression

Variable	Odds Ratio	p-value
Deforestation	2.10	0.01*
Overgrazing	2.50	0.00*
Soil Fertility	0.65	0.03*

* denotes variable significance at 0.05 level of significance

The regression results in Table 7 indicate that deforestation and overgrazing significantly reduce livelihood outcomes, while soil fertility improves it. The model explains approximately 70% of variation in livelihood index. The regression results show that deforestation ($\beta = -0.45$, $p = 0.002$) and overgrazing ($\beta = -0.52$, $p = 0.000$) negatively affect livelihood outcomes, while soil fertility ($\beta = 0.38$, $p = 0.005$) has a positive effect. Similarly, the logistic regression indicates higher odds of poverty with deforestation (OR = 2.10) and overgrazing (OR = 2.50), while improved soil fertility reduces it (OR = 0.65). These findings align with Barbier (1997) and Ellis (2000), confirming that land degradation reduces rural livelihoods.

Conclusion

Land degradation in Kachia LGA is significant, with declining forest cover, soil fertility loss, and increased overgrazing adversely affecting rural livelihoods. Both satellite imagery and field perceptions confirm the extent and severity of degradation. Households face reduced crop yields, livestock productivity loss, and heightened food insecurity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- i. Promote sustainable land management practices: Implement afforestation, agroforestry, and soil conservation to restore degraded lands.
- ii. Strengthen institutional support: Enhance extension services and technical assistance to farmers for effective land management.
- iii. Encourage alternative livelihoods: Reduce pressure on land through off-farm income opportunities.
- iv. Community-based awareness programs: Conduct training on sustainable land use and climate-smart agriculture to improve adoption.

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