Abstract

The fuelwood debate over supply–demand balances is well rehearsed; and the use of simplistic linear models to explain supply–demand differentials hardly captures the complex patterns of use and dynamics of fuelwood in the rural household. This paper shows that households in Nyando District have evolved sophisticated local response mechanisms and strategies in coping with the fuelwood scarcity. Data collected through a multi-method approach revealed, among others, a higher percentage of planted trees in Kochogo than in Awasi study sites. Despite this high proliferation of trees, rural households in Kochogo still identified fuelwood scarcity as a growing problem. The seeming ‘abundance’ of trees is not synonymous with the supply of fuelwood, or the alleviation of fuelwood scarcity. Rural households in Kochogo therefore resort to the market to purchase fuelwood, as well as adapt various fuel-saving strategies and mechanisms to cope with the apparent scarcity. The purchase of crop residues from the market is a strong indicator of this scarcity, being simply lack of access to or entitlement to trees. The situation is different in Awasi, where there is a higher percentage of natural trees and clump bushes, which provide a relative abundance of fuelwood. This condition has encouraged local households not to keep a stock of fuelwood, but simply to collect from nearby bushes when required.