

## Abstract

Invasive alien species (IAS) are among the leading threats to biodiversity, food security and human well-being. *Opuntia* (prickly pear cactus) is one of the most widespread and naturalized in the arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya, with extreme effects on rural livelihoods and the environment. However, comprehensive information on the status of invasion in the country is lacking, which is crucial for developing strategies for prevention and management. This paper, therefore, provides an overview of the interacting factors that influence its invasion in Kenya in terms of species diversity, pathways of introduction, negative impacts and the effectiveness of regulations and control measures. Seven invasive species of *Opuntia* are present in the country with the most abundant (*O. stricta*) being under biocontrol trial. These species have the same habitat preferences, physiological traits, negative impacts, introduction pathways and management options. Invasion is mainly attributed to changes in land use and consequent land degradation. Introduction pathways are largely intentional for ornamental purposes but unintentional at a local scale through escape from gardens and natural dispersal. The most applied methods of managing *Opuntia* are mechanical and chemical methods that are unsustainable and labour-intensive at large scale. Effective policies are therefore needed to prevent an increase in the significant negative impacts caused by IAS including those that have a limited distribution.