ABSTRACT
Climate change is a global phenomenon which affects each and every individual irrespective of race, religious affiliation or nationality. It is a challenge which calls for attention of every nation, region and individual. Its impacts are more visible in countries that are already tormented by poverty. This implies that unless properly tackled, climate change impacts will frustrate development efforts of poor countries. This study set out to assess the impacts of climate change on the socio-economic development of rural households in Kayonza district, eastern Rwanda. Data was collected from 100 households using interviews, focused group discussions, observation and questionnaires. Findings of the study revealed that majority of the respondents were aware of the climate change phenomenon and had received information about it through the media, village meetings and friends. Deforestation, poor farming methods, bush burning and economic activities in developed countries were reported as the major causes of climate change. Decline in crop yields, water scarcity, increased incidence of crop disease and pests, impassable roads and death of livestock were reported as the most significant impacts of climate change and variability. The respondents had local adaptation strategies which included shifting to safe areas, storing food and afforestation. It was reported that there were factors limiting employment of better coping and adaptation strategies. These included lack of timely climate variability information, lack of government policies related to climate change adaptation and lack of economic diversification. Small-scale irrigation, afforestation, water harvesting and introduction of fast maturing food crops were reported as coping and adaptation strategies that would be developed to increase their resilience to climate change impacts. This study concludes that climate change impacts have negatively affected the socio-economic development of households in Kayonza district since economic activities such agriculture and transport which are the pillars of development have been severely affected. There is thus a need to sensitize people about the impacts of climate change and sustainable coping and adaption strategies as well as mitigation measure. Key words Climate change impacts, socio-economic development, rural households, Kayonza district