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Viewing Multi-Functionality in Agriculture as a Tool for Development in the Latin American Tropics

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Abstract

The recognition of multi-functionality in agriculture is viewed in this paper as an avenue to achieve sustainable rural development in the humid tropics. From a narrower point of view -seen from the agricultural sector – multi-functionality embeds all those functions generally attributed to the sector itself, such as commodity production, animal husbandry and of lately forestry, to the overall society. This is deemed particularly important in rural areas because it is linked to the production of goods (food, feed, timber, raw materials) and services (environmental protection, biodiversity, landscape modulation, water conservation, tourism) that sustain rural life. It is important to notice that these multiple functions attributed to agriculture could have been intended or not; or they could be permanent or just occasional. Linked to the above, another important set of functions are related to income generation and the multiplicative effects on investment and consumption. Also the demand function of agriculture is included as well as the negative side effects.

However, in a more broader sense of rural development, multi-functionality includes all other possible links to other rural economic sectors (other than agriculture), including Agribusiness, services and infrastructure. Important are here the interaction processes between the various economic rural sectors, the non-agricultural employment and income generation processes. Non-agricultural sectors demand agricultural goods and services. Multi-functionality then includes the whole rural landscape with sectors, institutions and organizations interlinked to urban centers.

Summarizing the term, it means all the commercial and non-commercial functions within rural areas and to outside spheres and especially the interaction network supporting the functions.

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