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Socio-economic Development of Indigenous People in Three Different Environments in Pernambuco, Brazil

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Abstract

Indigenous people in the Amazon rainforest are often in the focus of international interests. Socio-economic research in this zone has shown difficulties in getting adequate information from those traditional systems. Areas and indigenous societies in the Pernambuco State have been selected since the contacts to the outside world exist and would allow better information for research. The main problems these societies face are the increasing pressure for land from outside people, small connection to the monetary system and market and certain crises of tribal identity. Three different indigenous groups have been selected which differ in their ecological and economic environment and hence, show different relations to the outside world and economic development. The objective of the study is to analyse the socio-economic development of indigenous people in and changing environment and to assess the future potential for a sustainable socio-economic development in the frame of the cultural settings. The indigenous families were classified according to their different ethnic features and different environmental conditions. Indigenous families were randomly selected and interviewed. The methods adopted in this study were the Farming Systems Approach to describe and analyse the socio-economic settings of the indigenous families, and a comparative analysis between the three farming systems to track down differences in resource capacities, problems and impacts. The current results denoted that the closer the indigenous are to the urban centres, the higher the off-farm income and the higher the tendency to re-allocate indigenous family work to off-farm activities. Those living in the arid zone have lower farm income and living standard than in the other ecological environments. There are indications that irrigation in the highly erratic rainfall areas could improve the farm income if market relations can be developed. The perception of the different ethnic groups indicate a close relation to traditional behaviour and culturally based decision-making. Three strategies are interesting for testing using simulation models: **(1)** water resource development, **(2)** changes in credit conditions and **(3)** introduction of less-water intensive crops.

Keywords: Brazil, farming systems, indigenous people, living standard, socio-economic development