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Diversification of Shifting Cultivation Cycles among Small-scale Farmers in the Peruvian Amazon

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Abstract

Since the population in developing countries increases, the agriculture expand into the new area, which is mainly forest in the tropics. About 60 % of the deforestation of tropical rain forests is carried out by small-scale farmers. This research is focused on the Amazon basin, where small-scale farmers widely practice shifting cultivation. Main objective was to create a classification system of methods of land use and found out typical crop sequence, composition and length of particular phases of shifting cultivation cycle on the basis of fields' history. Land use was examined in two settlements- Antonio Raimondi and Pimental in Ucayali, Peru. Research aimed at characterising the differences in land use after initial slash-and-burn. Data were gathered through semi-structured questionnaire and were focused on socio-demographic and field characteristics, crop sequence and composition, and length of different stages of shifting cultivation cycle currently practised among agroforestry-reliant households (n= 27). Visit to crop field and forest fallow aimed to reconstruction of extensive cropping history. Several specific cycles were identified for each study site. Whereas settlers in Antonio Raimondi plant annual crops after slashing and burning the forest, settlers in Pimental gave more importance to perennial crops. Process of deforestation and land degradation is relatively more pronounced in younger settlement (Antonio Raimondi). These differences are caused by different social background. Land holdings among households within traditional communities are unequally distributed and reflect local land scarcity. These results question the view of indigenous agriculture systems as 'unsustainable' and underscore the importance of studying local variation in indigenous agroforestry practices.

Keywords: Agroforestry, deforestation, land degradation, slash-and-burn, swidden-fallow