



Tropentag, October 9-11, 2007, Witzenhausen

“Utilisation of diversity in land use systems:
Sustainable and organic approaches to meet human needs”

Sustainable Livelihood Examples from Water Deficient Easter Island and the Lower Amazon River Floodplains

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Abstract

The Brundtland Commission definition of sustainable development (1987) is used in this assessment: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000) recommend a trend toward sustainable development principles in tropical regions encompassing social, cultural, economic, political and environmental components. Environmental sustainability can only be achieved through natural resources proficient utilisation, with emphasis to the ancestral formulas that have sustained human presence in fragile tropical regions along the years. In times of climate excesses it is of utmost importance to seek for indigenous livelihoods that offer evidence of viable techniques and land uses able to cope with floods and drought, as is the case with lower Amazon basin peasantries, the Caboclos, and Easter Island aboriginal Rapa Nui peoples. The main purpose of the ongoing research in Lower Amazon riverine areas is to learn how local small-holders live from the forest and by the forest. Successful examples of ethno-development persist along Amazon River margins, providing the possibility to discuss multi-functional livelihoods and multi-local biodiverse agro-forestry models. In the paradigmatic Chilean Pacific Island, a remote and poorly resource provided ecosystem, one of the most vulnerable in the world, peri-urban farmers use rainfall reservoir systems to water supply subsistence and commercial crops. The case studies are contrasting in terms of water availability however presenting similarities in livelihood systems, their creativity and adaptive nature meeting the demands of climate change and their uniqueness confronting pressing global development options.

Keywords: Easter Island, livelihoods, lower Amazon basin, resource proficiency