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The Contribution of Smallholder Forest Plantation Development to Sustainable Livelihood of Farm Households in the High Forest Zone of Ghana

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Abstract

In view of the rapid expansion of farm forestry by rural farmers in Ghana, the study investigated the contribution of smallholder forest plantation development to sustainable livelihood of rural households. It identified and analysed the socio-economic conditions of the rural households' that induce their decision to establish and manage smallholder forest plantation as an alternative land use option in the face of decreasing agricultural outputs and increasing poverty in rural areas. The study was based on an enumeration of 280 households engaged in forest plantation management in the Offinso district of Ghana. Primary data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires, expert interviews, group discussions and wealth ranking, as well as observation. Data were analysed employing socio-metric and statistical software packages. The analysis began with the characterisation of the rural households based on their socio-economic conditions, benefits perceived from managing smallholder forest plantation and the livelihood system. The results indicate that changes in household livelihood priorities, favourable institutional conditions and market opportunities motivated the households to manage smallholder forest plantation on their farms. The role of forest plantation in increasing farm income and risk aversion strategies of the households was well recognised by the households. It was found out that rural households generally establish and manage smallholder forest plantation for meeting various household needs. Although there is a good chance of smallholder forest plantation management in improving the livelihood needs of rural households, thereby reducing poverty in rural areas, as well as reducing pressure on natural forest resources and conserving biodiversity, this practice also contributed in some cases to widen the gap between households with more resource endowments and those with relatively less assets.

Keywords: Alternative landuse, income generation, poverty alleviation, smallholder forest plantation development, sustainable livelihood