



Tropentag, October 9-11, 2007, Witzenhausen

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

“The King Is Naked”: a Critical Analysis of the Community Forestry Concept as Applied in the Amazonian Region

BENNO POKORNY, GABRIEL MEDINA, JAMES JOHNSON

University of Freiburg, Institute of Silviculture, Germany

Abstract

Since the World summit in Rio in the year 1992, the concept of community forestry became more and more the focus of development organisation acting in the Amazon region. Based on the assumption that poverty is one of the main drivers for forest destruction, sustainable timber management was expected to contribute to one of the priority challenges of Amazon countries, to combine forest conservation with rural development. The considerable efforts of national governments supported by the international community resulted in a number of promising demonstration projects and remarkable improvements of national laws and regulations. To analyse the potential of community forestry for rural development, the EU financed international research project ForLive studied 16 community forestry initiatives throughout the Amazon in Bolivia, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador. The study revealed that current community forestry concept is repeating the errors of former development initiatives based on modernisation approaches. The implementation of predefined technological packages based on Reduced Impact Logging, the focus on timber and market approaches and its operationalisation in externally driven pilot projects resulted in relatively low success, a low probability for replication and may generate even negative effects to poor people. Community forestry implies the danger that smallholders are encroached for achieving the economic and environmental goals of more powerful parts of the national and global society. To effectively use forests as a basis for sustainable rural development, a drastic re-orientation is necessary towards approaches, which enable local communities to develop their own resource management strategies in accordance with their demands and capacities.

Keywords: Amazon, community forestry, rural development