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Linking Natural Resource Management with Market Oriented Commodity Development: Case Studies from the Ethiopian Highlands

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Abstract

Ethiopia has been in continuous struggle to achieve the three objectives of increasing agricultural production, reducing poverty and ensuring sustainable use of the natural resources, especially since the early 1990s. Increasing population pressure on an already degrading land resource has rendered the struggle even tougher. A significant increase in agricultural productivity can not be attained if the land resource base continues to be degraded. Hence, ensuring sustainable land management is a matter of critical importance for agricultural growth in Ethiopia. A number of programs and projects for sustainable land management have been implemented in Ethiopia since the early 1970s, aimed at promoting private and collective efforts to conserve natural resources. In designing policies, programs and projects for sustainable land management, it is of critical importance to make a distinction between the proximate (direct) and underlying (indirect) causes of land degradation. Efforts for sustainable land management need to address the underlying causes primarily, as focusing on the proximate causes would mean to address the symptoms of the problem rather than the actual causes. In this paper we focus mainly on the effect of short-term benefits to farmers from sustainable land management practices and the explicit considerations of the linkages between natural resource management and market oriented commodity development. We hypothesise that linking natural resource management with market oriented commodity development enhances sustainable land management by providing farmers with short-term benefits. We test this hypothesis with analysis of case studies of four districts in the highlands of Ethiopia. Two of the case studies deal with the linkage between forage resource development and market oriented livestock development, and the other two case studies deal with the linkage between conservation agriculture and market oriented wheat production. Results indicate that, indeed, direct linkages of natural resource management with market oriented commodity development that have profitable market opportunities can enhance sustainable land management.

Keywords: Causes of land degradation, land degradation, market oriented commodity development, short-term benefits, Sustainable land management