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Livestock: Threat or Natural Resource for the Future?

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Abstract

Livestock is frequently brand marked as the responsible factor for deforestation and land degradation. Recent publications, such as the Greenpeace report “Slaughtering the Amazon”, are an example of such an argumentation. It seems to be worthwhile to look behind the process of deforestation and differentiate the message about its relationship with livestock — mostly cattle — production.

Taking the case of the Amazon region as an example, the deforestation process is briefly explained and the determinants for sustainable agro-silvo-pastoral systems are described. The various reasons why sustainable systems are not implemented are discussed. For squatters and smallholders, a better access to services and knowledge is necessary to improve the sustainability of their production systems, including livestock. This would take pressure away from the forest.

The better enforcement of existing laws and the improvement of the governance system based on sanctions, incentives and technical possibilities that promote forest conservation for landlords and companies investing in forest land are needed.

This presentation advocates for a revival of support for sustainable animal husbandry projects and a better and more intensive use of already existing pastures in the agricultural frontier regions. These new projects should be people centred. Moreover, they should not be restricted to production, but follow a comprehensive value chain approach, including an improvement of services (advisory services, veterinary services) and better marketing strategies. The different services can follow different models. The value chain approach should also recognise different value chains from the product to the table, to local and international markets.

Keywords: Deforestation, environment, governance systems, livestock, value chain