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Understanding Livelihood Strategies of Different Generations of Plantain Farmers in Nicaragua – An Analysis of Investment in Agriculture and Demand of Technologies

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Abstract

Plantain production for subsistence and cash income generation is a traditionally important part of small holders livelihoods in the South Pacific region of Nicaragua, both in the mainland of Rivas department and Ometepe island in the Lake of Nicaragua.

Improved access to education and increasing integration of rural young people into near-by urban labour markets raise the question of the future role of plantain production in livelihood strategies and the demand for innovations in the medium and longer term. This study analyses the livelihood strategies and aspirations of different generations of plantain farmers and identifies their needs in terms of plantain production technologies and market strategies.

Data on livelihood strategies, plantain technology and demand for innovations was collected from 99 households of plantain farmers including young farmers (under 35 years), older farmers and their adolescent sons and daughters (the future generation).

Results illustrate that plantain is the major component in livelihood strategies. A large majority of farmers wish their children to become farmers, and most of the young people consider plantain as a good option to make a living. Only slight differences were found in the asset base of older and younger farmers. However, compared to young and older farmers, the future generation reaches significantly higher education levels.

Major differences in assets and in the demand for innovations were found between the survey sites. In Rivas farmers have already intensified plantain production and are interested in improving irrigation systems. As major limitations, farmers in this area mentioned credit availability and high interest rates on capital. On Ometepe plantain productivity is much lower. Farmers feel constrained by a lack of knowledge about improved plantain production technologies. Under current poor infrastructure on the island, farmers perceive the use of modern inputs such as fertilisers as a first step for improving production. In general, there is only little awareness of possible marketing innovations among farmers of all ages in both survey sites, an option that might gain importance as the higher educated young people take over responsibilities on the farms.

Keywords: Different generations, innovation, livelihoods, Nicaragua, plantain