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Are Local Livelihood Strategies Compatible with a Sustainable Management of Forest Fragments?

ZORA LEA URECH¹, JEAN-PIERRE SORG¹, HANS RUDOLF FELBER²

¹ETH Zurich, Department of Environmental Sciences (D-UWIS), Switzerland

²ETH Zurich, Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences (D-GESS), Switzerland

Abstract

Since the first human settlement on the island of Madagascar, forest areas have continuously been decreasing, mainly due to shifting cultivation. By putting new forest management strategies and conservation activities into place, various governmental and non-governmental projects tried to counter this trend of deforestation. Until today those efforts have not succeeded to halt deforestation. A possible explanation for the failure of these projects is that most of the implemented strategies were based on western ideas of conservation and did not sufficiently take local livelihood strategies into account.

Our research project therefore focused on local livelihood systems and strategies in a forested landscape at the east coast of Madagascar. The methodology was based on the sustainable livelihood approach and we worked in four different villages situated around a large fragmented forest corridor. The aim was to understand the importance of forest fragments and its resources to the livelihood of the rural population, what influence deforestation has on people's livelihood and how they react on deforestation. Assuming changing importance of forest fragments depending on availability, we studied 4 villages situated in different distances to forest resources.

Our results show that although the overall importance of forest fragments is high, the interest to decrease deforestation activities remains very low. The awareness of the importance of forest resources only develops when forest fragments are already scarce. Most farmers, living far from forest resources have succeeded to adapt their livelihood strategies without suffering from a high impact on their livelihoods. Finally this research gives indications to what extent a sustainable forest management could be integrated in local livelihood systems. It highlights constraints and challenges to realise a successful improvement of forest management.

Keywords: Forest landscapes, livelihood, Madagascar, Tropical forestry