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“Development on the margin”

The Political Landscape of Agricultural Conversion and Conservation Institutional Alliances in Kerala, India

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Abstract

Development at the margins has at least two faces. On the one hand, new opportunities for livelihoods may result in integration in to mainstream economy and conversions of farming-systems. On the other hand does change critically endanger the conversation functions of remote and less frequented places. The question arises which development pathways for sensitive areas might lead to a sustainable future for all? This contribution wants to look into the political landsape of conversion and conservation in a highland district in southern India to analyse the driving factors and interest groups fostering the dramatic change of land use taking place. The focus rests on the relation between mainstream society and the indigenous tribal population, who both are affected by a rapid decline of paddy cultivation and a conversion into banana plantations.

The study rests on a empirical analysis of the institutional environment governing rice-cultivation with a special concern for agrobiodiversity. The data consists on interviews and net-map analysis with administration and civil society, tribal organisations and political institutions on community level. Sketching the linkages of the political landscape of rice conserving and rice conversing forces, the hidden interests of assumed unintentional change can be shown. Considering the political, the administrative and civil society allow to describe the powerfield in which the marginalised tribal population is operating. This analysis is a first step to identify possible alliances for a sustainable development at the margins. Agrobiodiversity may serve as an indicator to highlight the interrelation between society and its natural resources as well as between mainstream and tribal population.

Keywords: Agrobiodiveristy, indigenous population, land use change, political economy