



Tropentag, October 5-7, 2011, Bonn

“Development on the margin”

Sustainable Management of Resources in Agriculture in a Fragile and Resource Poor Context

JUTTA SCHMITZ, STEPHAN KRALL

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Division Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Germany

Abstract

The concept of sustainable agriculture comprises three aspects: The production of biomass or animals should not deplete natural resources or make them unusable through pollution; socio-cultural aspects have to be considered, meaning that e.g. land use rights have to be respected and exploitation of labour must be eradicated; from an economic perspective, agriculture must pay off and be profitable so that people are able to make a living of it in order for development to occur. To put this into terms of the Green Economy: Growth must be decoupled from resource consumption. Such an economic approach protects fragile ecosystems and acknowledges ecosystem services as well as values them. Conventional agriculture is often only highly profitable, because the costs for environmental or social damages are externalized. If these costs were internalised, however, conventional agriculture would have no comparative advantage over a responsible, sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture is profitable and the only future prospect for a socio-economic development, in particular in agrarian dominated countries, as being the case with many developing countries. One problem is marginal areas, such as the Sahel, where agriculture is predominantly at a subsistence level and resources are frequently depleted and the soils are consequently being degraded. The immense population growth, which caused a doubling of the world population within the last decades, makes it increasingly difficult to produce sufficient food without depleting the available resources. One consequence is increased desertification. In these contexts, a reorganisation of agriculture and animal husbandry may only lead to sustainable agriculture if backed by demographic policy. Under marginal conditions, knowledge as well as means of production, which could transform agriculture from subsistence oriented into sustainable market oriented agriculture, is often lacking. In regions, where the private sector has no interest to invest, it is even more the responsibility of governments to create suitable framework conditions, which promote the development of a sustainable production and enhance socio-economic development.

Keywords: Land use, sustainable agriculture