Tropentag, October 5-7, 2011, Bonn

"Development on the margin"

Socioeconomic and Ecological Factors that Determine Food Security Levels of Households in Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia

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Abstract

Similar to most parts of Ethiopia, food security situation of households in the Central Rift Valley (CRV) region of the country is greatly influenced by the performance of rain-fed farming systems, which fluctuates with variability in rainfall. In order to improve the livelihoods of people in the area, there will be a great need to improve the performance of this sector. Although farmers in the area face nearly similar environmental conditions, the situation of their food security is usually diverse: some are frequently food-insecure while others are food self-sufficient. Therefore, this study was conducted to describe and analyse the current food-secure and insecure rain-fed farming systems. It also aimed at identification of factors associated with food-secure and insecure farming systems, and exploring future research needs and actions to improve the performance of rain-fed farming systems. A holistic systems analytical approach was used to make the analysis and the description. Three food-secure and three food-insecure peasant associations (Kebeles) were purposively selected for a survey. From each set of Kebeles, thirty-nine households were randomly selected and interviewed about both biophysical and socioeconomic features of the rain-fed farming systems. This information was supplemented with data from repeated farm visits, discussions with selected key farmers, other stakeholders and official records. Drought, shortage of agricultural land, and poor soil fertility were identified as major constraints in both food-secure and food-insecure Kebeles. On the other hand, the two categories of farmers were found to significantly differ ($p \leq 0.05$) in their farm management choices and decisions, coping mechanisms against shocks, time allocated to on-farm activities, soil fertility management practices, allocation of production resources towards more valuable crops, and manipulation of selling time of crops. Thus, it is not only what happens in their environment that creates differences between food security and in-security conditions among farmers, but also how they react to these environmental happenings and constraints can have great impacts. Therefore, focusing on socio-cultural issues in a way that improves farmers' perceptions and attitudes can contribute a significant part to any problem-solving agenda in the area, in addition to focusing on biophysical problems.

Keywords: Biophysical factors, ecological functioning, food insecurity, food security, off-farm employment, rain-fed farming systems

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