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“Resilience of agricultural systems against crises”

Livelihoods Sustainability and REDD Implementation in Communal Lands in Northeastern Ecuador

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Abstract

Almost half of the world tropical rain forests are located in the Amazon basin. Tropical rainforests are crucial for supporting, providing and regulating ecosystem services. Apart from that, they have a high cultural value, as community forests in developing countries support livelihoods and fulfil human spiritual and religious needs. This applies especially for indigenous populations that directly depend on forest resources. Despite the proven necessity to engage local inhabitants in conservation activities, little attention has been given to the manner in how indigenous and local inhabitants manage community lands in the Amazon. The “tragedy of the commons” opened the discussion about the sustainability of open-access land systems and consequently the misuse of resources. Later on, Ostrom (1990) showed some principles under which circumstances common property regimes could work. Implementation of reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD) proof again the capacity of communities to cope under different communal land arrangements.

In this presentation, an analysis of the territorial configuration and the socio-political organisation of two indigenous tribes, the Shuar and the Kichwa are presented and compared to a “campesino-mestizo” group living in the buffer zone of the Yasuní National Park, Ecuador. In addition, an evaluation of the possible impacts of REDD+ implementation is presented.

Communities living in the Yasuní are highly heterogenic and complex. Insecure land tenure, increasing population and national legal uncertainties about carbon property rights should be clarified along with the national socio- and environmental safeguards. We found high difficulties to discern the impacts of mining and oil companies in the region as well as illegal logging effects when compared to the implementation of carbon-related-businesses. However, is undoubtedly the importance to define legal framework uncertainties, mechanisms of distribution of benefits and governance of communal indigenous lands to avoid negative impacts in local livelihoods when entering in a REDD process.

Keywords: Communal lands, conservation, forest dependency, livelihood, REDD+, Ecuador Yasuní